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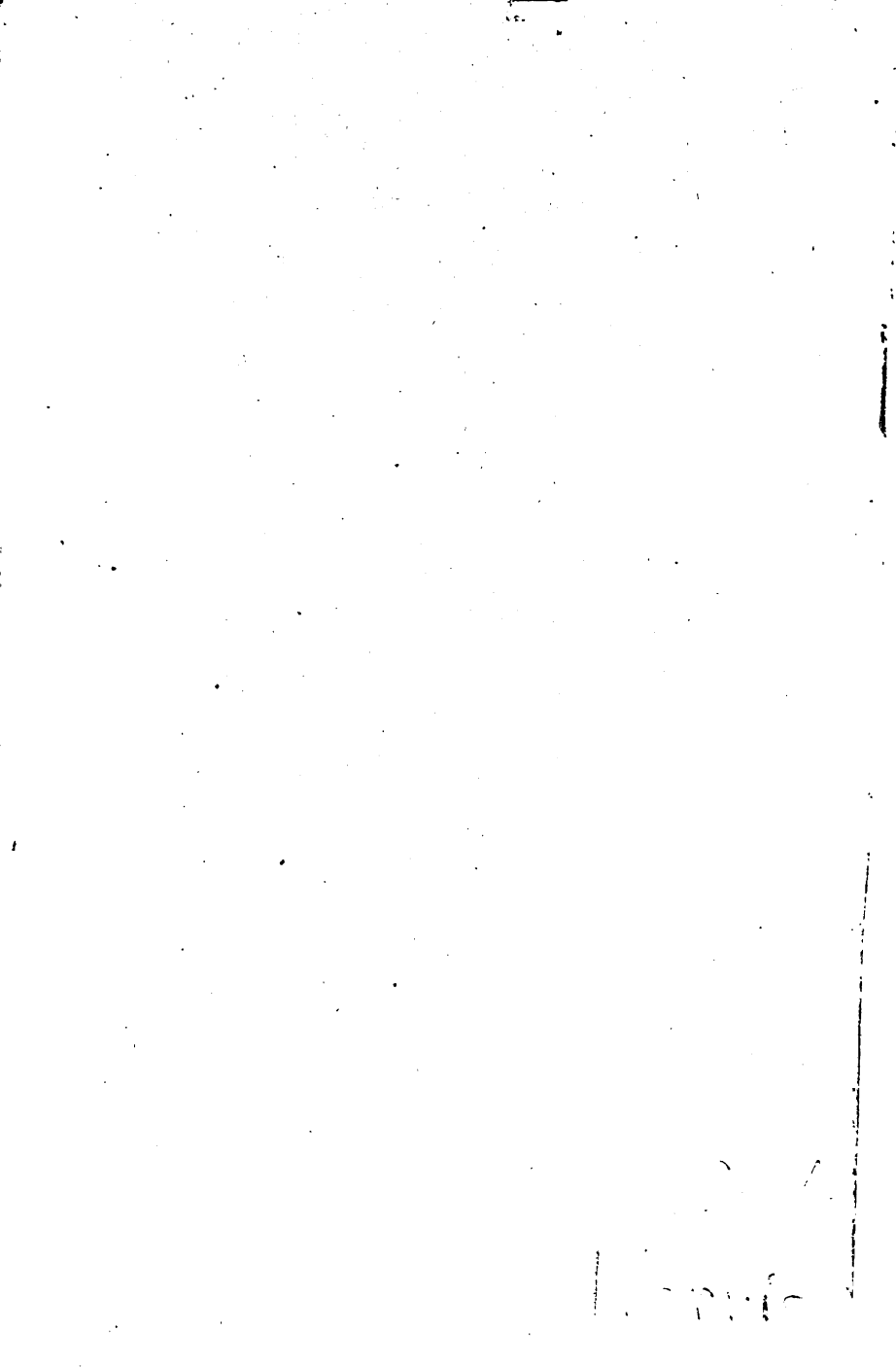
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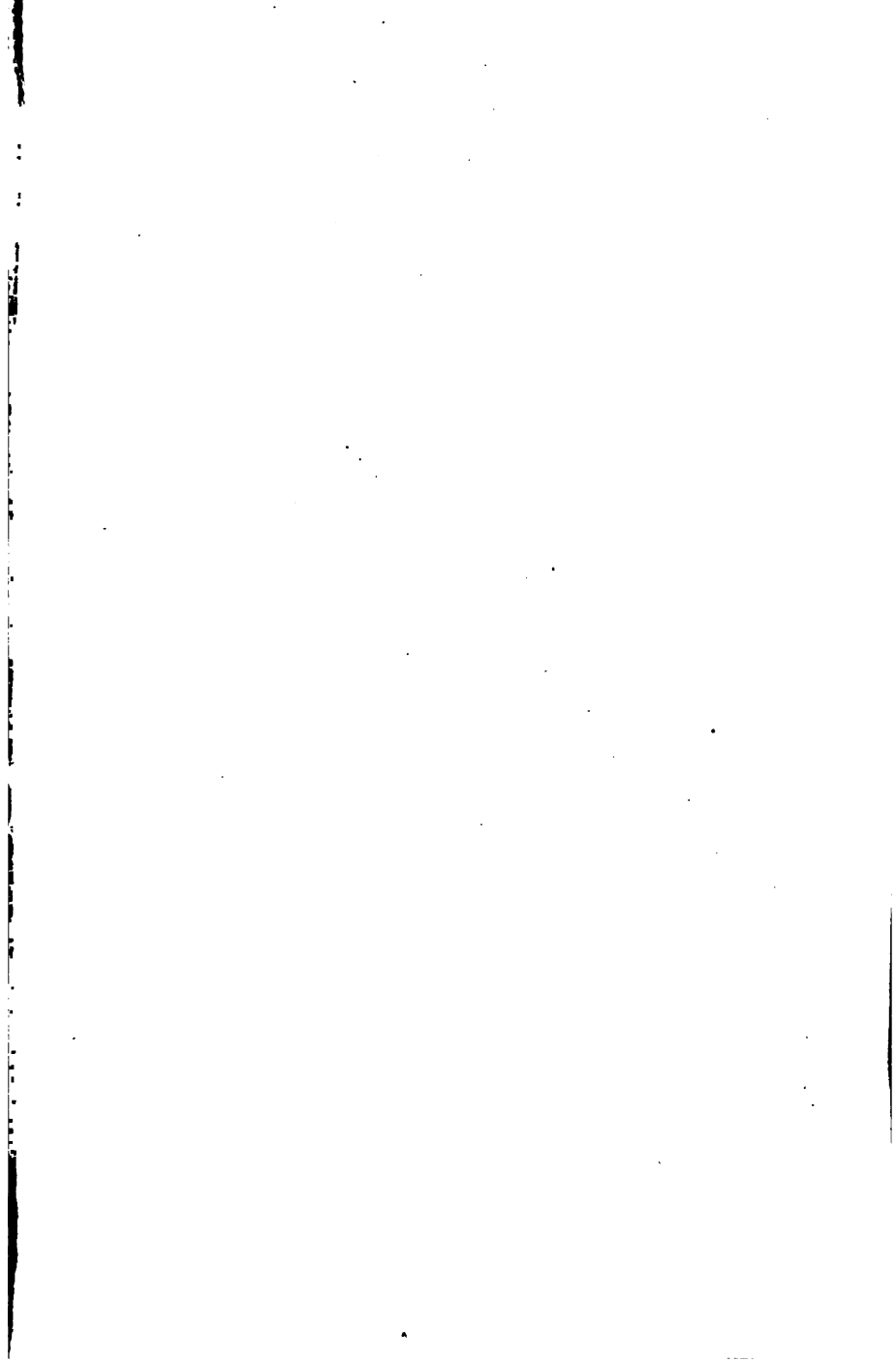


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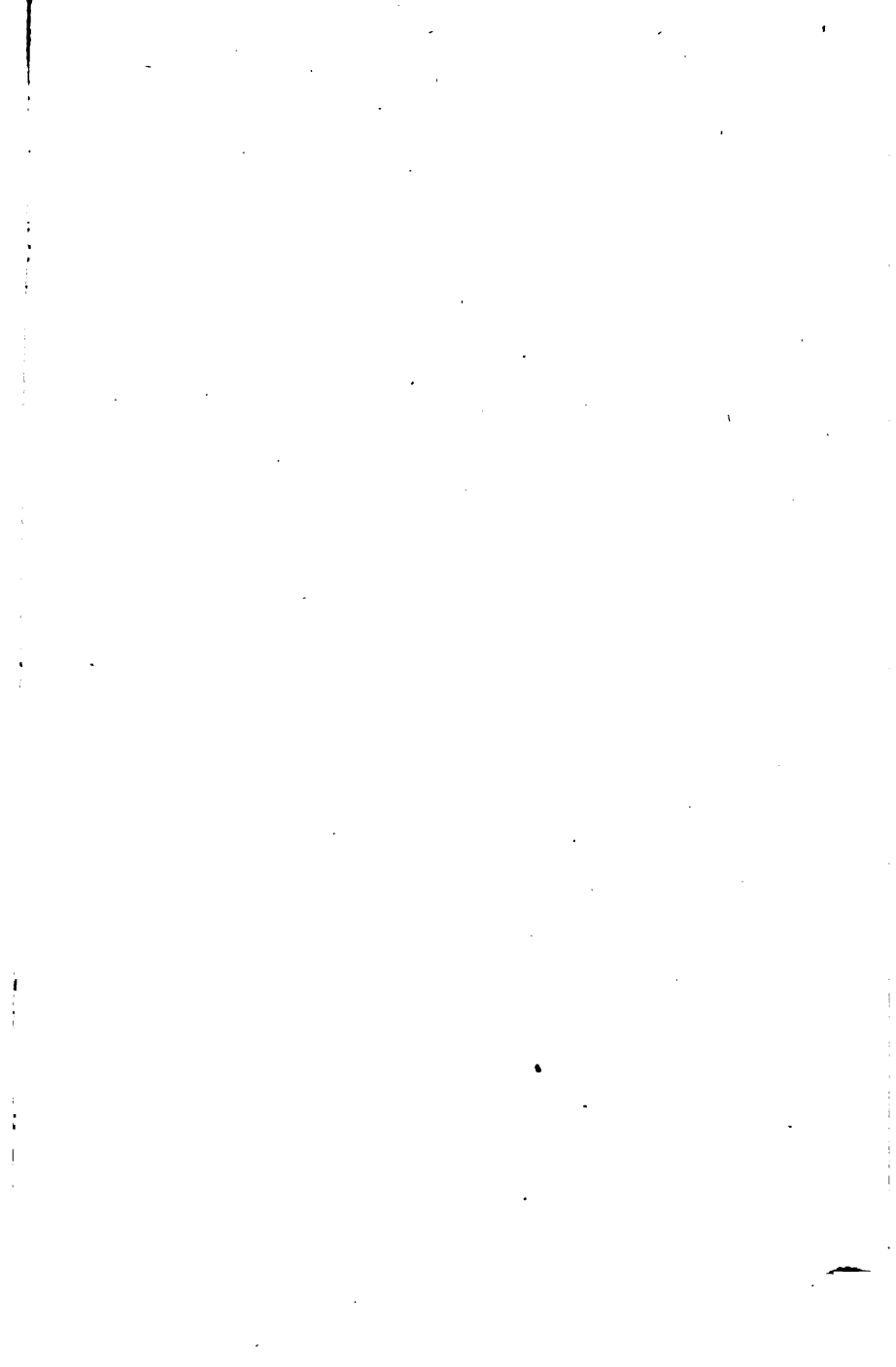




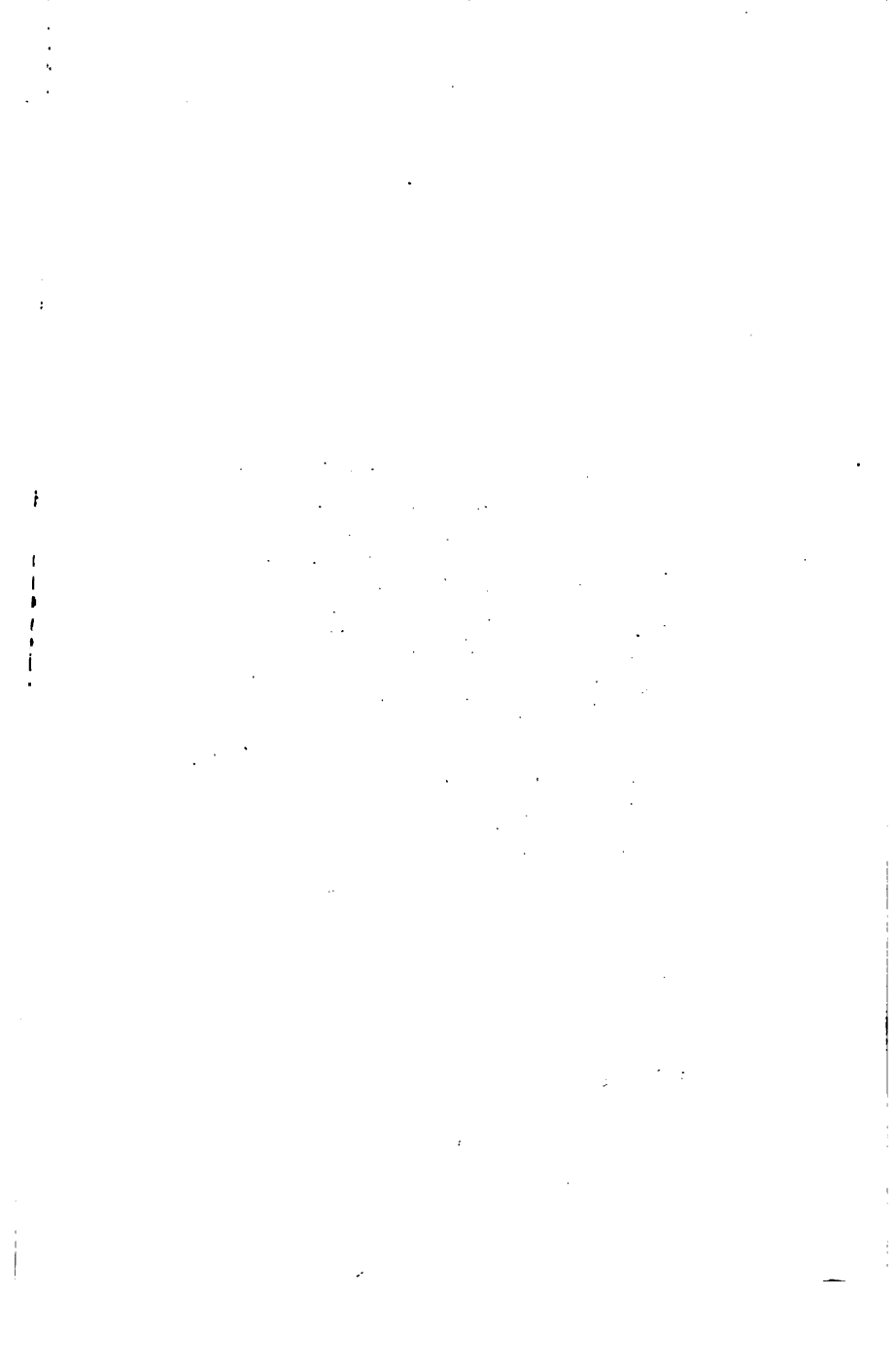












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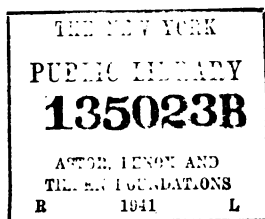
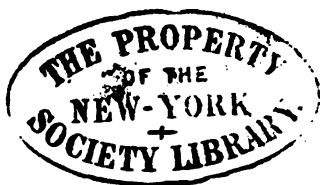
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HIS OWN FATHER.

CHAPTER I.

PREMONITION.

THERE were moments when the premature whiteness of Mrs. Hamilton's hair struck everybody as a mere freak on the part of nature and rather an enhancement than otherwise of charms which had survived four decades of existence. There were also moments when she looked quite old, despite her slim figure, and her refined, prettyish little features. It was, as her intimates were well aware, a question of expression, a question of whether she happened to be feeling worried or not; and they were likewise aware that it did not take a very great deal to worry her.

"Well, what's wrong now?" inquired the bronzed, military-looking man of thirty or thereabouts who had

stationed himself beside the bench upon which she was seated, and who had been watching, with inward amusement, the deepening horizontal lines on her forehead.

The scene was a ball-room in Dresden, which hospitable city had for some months past enjoyed the privilege of entertaining Mrs. Hamilton and her daughter, and it may have been for the sake of sharing that privilege that Captain Clough, albeit a non-dancer, was now leaning against the wall in close proximity to one of the two ladies whose trusted friend and ally he was. Mrs. Hamilton's foot ceased to tap the polished floor, as she glanced up at her interrogator with a certain half-childish fretfulness.

"Daphne has danced three times running with that long-legged protégé of yours," she said.

"So I have noticed," he returned imperturbably. "That shows Miss Daphne's discrimination; for there are few better waltzers in Europe, I am told, than Otto von Kahlenburg."

"But—three times running! Besides, I don't much like the look of him somehow. Who is the man?—where did you pick him up?"

"In Vienna originally, I think. Or was it when I was shooting at his uncle's place in the Salzkammergut? Anyhow——"

"Then he *is* an Austrian!" interrupted Mrs. Hamilton, with an unaccountable suggestion of alarm and repugnance in her voice.

"Oh, he's an Austrian, if there's any harm in that. It isn't given to the whole human race to be Englishmen, you know; though he is really a good enough sportsman to have been born in our favoured islands. Anyhow, as I was going to say, he is of the highest respectability, besides being the dancer and the good-looking fellow that you see he is. An excellent amateur actor, too—in short, a social success all round. Why you should dislike the look of him I can't imagine."

Mrs. Hamilton made no immediate response; but presently she said, in a tone calculated to put an end to further discussion, "Well, whatever his nationality may be, I don't like his going on in this way. Daphne came to Dresden for music lessons, and I only wish that I had kept to my first intention of avoiding the society of the place; but from the

moment that one admits the thin edge of the wedge—However, we shall soon be leaving now ; that's one comfort."

"Not to me," observed Captain Clough, smiling.

"Why, surely you don't propose to make a long stay in Dresden! What attraction can it have for you?"

"I sometimes wonder. Perhaps, apart from your presence, its attractions are not overwhelming. At the same time, I can quite understand Miss Daphne's enjoying herself here, and I am glad to notice that she does."

"Jack," exclaimed Mrs. Hamilton impatiently, "you are very provoking!—and very stupid!"

"Because I understand things?"

"Not at all!—because, on the contrary, you don't! However, I should have thought that even you might understand one's reluctance to throw a young girl amongst the people whom one meets in places of this sort."

"But the Saxons are charming people."

"They may be ; I don't know them well enough to judge. You will allow, though, that the English

are appalling. Just look at this one, who is bearing down upon us now, for instance!"

Captain Clough glanced towards the stout, rubicund, profusely-jewelled lady whom Mrs. Hamilton's fan indicated, and laughed. "Oh, I grant you that Mrs. Perkins is appalling," he answered. "She appals me so much that I haven't the pluck to wait and explain why I haven't asked either of her daughters for a dance. She will assuredly put that question to me if I do wait."

She actually did put it—in stentorian accents which dominated the braying of the band, and must have reached the swift fugitive's ears. But Mrs. Perkins, who was a good-humoured, philosophic, thick-skinned woman, did not greatly resent Captain Clough's discourteous flight; for she had already discovered that he was likely to prove useless for any purposes of hers. It was otherwise with Mrs. Hamilton, whom she believed to be well connected and who might subsequently be looked up in London with advantage, she thought. Therefore, although there really was not room for her at the end of the bench which Mrs. Hamilton occupied, and although no attempt

was made to offer her a modicum of space, she contrived, somehow or other, to sit down beside her victim.

"I want to congratulate you upon your daughter's conquest," she began. "Out and out the handsomest man in the room, and quite a grandee in his own country, I hear. Or is it only in Spain that there are grandees? Anyhow, he is a distinguished personage, and my girls are devoured with jealousy, I assure you. That is, they would be jealous if it had been anybody but dear Daphne who had cut them out."

Had Mrs. Hamilton possessed any capacity for snubbing intrusive fellow creatures, she would long ago have shaken off this tiresome woman, whose familiarity was odious to her, and who had no sort of right to call Daphne by her Christian name; but she was herself too sensitive to have recourse to salutary rudeness; so she only returned, in vexed, plaintive accents:

"Please do not imagine that my daughter wishes to make conquests of foreigners or to cut out anybody here. We are scarcely acquainted, as it happens, with Herr von Kahlenburg, who was introduced to

us, the other day, by Captain Clough, and we shall probably never see him again after to-night."

"Well, I'm sure it will be no fault of his if you don't see him again," Mrs. Perkins declared, with a shrill, cackling laugh; "he is desperately smitten, that's evident! And, between ourselves," she added, lowering her voice a little, "I know that he has set his heart upon persuading Daphne to act in some private theatricals with him next week. Oh, don't be alarmed! It will be a most select affair, and the King and Queen have promised to be present. One of the performers has been taken ill, it seems, which has landed them in rather a difficulty. Count von Kahlenburg—he is *Graf*, not *Herr*, by the way—told Minnie all about it, and as good as offered her the part; but I suppose he must have forgotten what he said, for this evening he announced as coolly as possible that he had decided to secure your daughter."

"That *he* had decided! Surely he could not have been so impertinent as to say that."

"Oh, well, I daresay he is accustomed to getting his own way; it is understood, of course, that he

must obtain your consent. Rather mortifying for Minnie to be thrown over so cavalierly, wasn't it? However, I will say for dear Minnie that there is nothing small about her, and indeed she has received so much attention from other quarters this winter that perhaps she can afford—but that is neither here nor there. Besides, her comparative ignorance of German, which Daphne speaks so beautifully, might have been an obstacle."

"My daughter," said Mrs. Hamilton resolutely, "does not speak German well enough to act in a German play with strangers, nor should I dream of allowing her to do so, if she did. Miss Perkins will certainly not be supplanted by her."

The fat lady laughed again. "Ah! we're all of us the slaves of our children in these days," she placidly remarked; "I have given up attempting to refuse my girls anything."

It crossed Mrs. Hamilton's mind that the duty of occasionally thwarting those squat, plain-headed young women might be found a good deal easier than that of disappointing Daphne, whose violet eyes, when veiled by a suspicion of tears, were well-

nigh irresistible. Beauty has its powers and its prerogatives even in the case of those most nearly related to us. At the same time, there could not and should not be any permission of this suggested play-acting; an accelerated departure from Dresden must, if necessary, be resorted to rather than that.

About ten minutes later Mrs. Hamilton had given her assent—a reluctant one, it is true, yet a distinct and binding assent—to the request which young von Kahlenburg, on restoring his partner to her mother's guardianship, put forward in excellent English and with a happy blending of supplication and temerity. Not, to be sure, that he owed this signal triumph to his blonde comeliness, his white teeth or his pleasant address. Such personal allurements were likely to tell rather against than for him—although, on the other hand, it did seem a little ridiculous to be prejudiced against the poor youth simply by reason of the fugitive resemblance that he bore to a certain fellow-countryman of his who had been dead and buried for ever so many years. But in truth it was Daphne who carried his point for him—carried it, too, with scarcely so much as a spoken word of entreaty.

"She always does!" Mrs. Hamilton apologetically owned to Jack Clough, who had drifted back to her side as soon as Mrs. Perkins had been induced by an elderly officer to visit the supper-room for the third time; "she has a way of looking at me—a sort of doggy way, don't you know?—as if she wanted something very much, but didn't like to put me to the pain of refusing. When she summons up that expression, all is over; I become as wax in her hands!"

"That," observed Captain Clough drily, "does not surprise me. I myself have once or twice been favoured in the way you describe, and I have instantly become as wax in her hands."

He gazed meditatively, as he spoke, at the subject of his confession, who was revolving amongst the dancers some yards away from him, and whose rippling bronze hair, dark-blue eyes and perfectly proportioned figure rendered her—so he often thought, but never said—the loveliest of created beings. Mrs. Hamilton stole a side glance at him, sighed and made as though she were about to say something, but apparently thought better of it.

"After all," she somewhat irrelevantly remarked at length, "there are national types, as well as family likenesses. I daresay most Austrians have flat backs, small waists, fair colouring and little turned-up moustaches."

"A good many of them have," Captain Clough answered; "but they are a mixed race, you know."

"Oh, I don't know anything about them," Mrs. Hamilton hastily declared; "I have met scarcely any Austrians in the course of my life. I wasn't particularly fascinated by those I did chance to come across, years ago, that was all. Well," she added presently, "we *must* go to Bayreuth the week after next, at all events. I can't imagine Daphne wanting to miss Bayreuth."

"I can imagine Otto von Kahlenburg wanting to go there. Scarcely for the sake of Wagner, though."

"Oh, Jack! you won't let him do that! I should so very much dislike it. And I should have thought that you would dislike it too!"

"My dear lady, is it ever a question of what we like or dislike, you and I? Isn't it invariably, and quite properly, a question of what Daphne likes?"

Besides I really can't pretend to any control over von Kahlenburg's movements."

"Jack," exclaimed Mrs. Hamilton vehemently, "I have no patience with you!"

He had, however, plenty of patience with her—and with others. Therefore he only laughed and held his peace.

CHAPTER II.

PERSUASION.

THE modern German Empire, busy, commercial, prosperous and thickly populated, has all but made a clean sweep of the old-world picturesqueness which used to characterise its component parts, and Dresden, that rococo little city which in years gone by was a miniature European capital, with a certain distinction of its own, has already become a big town like another—a town of flat, featureless façades and wide, windy streets, wherein hurried pedestrians jostle one another (no Dresdener was in a hurry thirty years ago) and whence clangorous electric tram-cars have well-nigh banished the deliberate *droschke* of an earlier date. It remains, however, a place of comparatively cheap living, extremely cheap education, and singular accessibility as regards its Court and high society ; for which excellent reasons Mrs. Perkins,

HIS OWN FATHER.

with a host of other British actresses, had decided to make her daughters tatter for the winter. By the evening at which period this narrative takes its start, the good lady was able to boast that her Minnie and her Rose "knew everybody": so that they were, as a matter of course included in the select assemblage which witnessed young Count von Kahlenburg's really wonderful acting.

"Well, I will say for him that he deserves it!" Mrs. Perkins cried, when the hero of the evening, amid prolonged applause, stepped before the curtain, leading the somewhat reluctant Miss Hamilton by the hand. "As for dear Daphne, she didn't make very much of her part: but she is so perfectly lovely that I don't think of taking her to be anything

At the same time, Rose and Minnie were good-natured girls, and they were sure, at any rate, that they were not taking her to be anything. They were of opinion that she would obtain a success which had just been so

"Well, it certainly looks as if he might," their mother agreed: "but I suspect that he will have some trouble with dear Mrs. Hamilton first. It is easy to see what *her* wishes are!"

She pointed her fan at the back of Captain Clough's closely cropped black head, which was visible, alongside of Mrs. Hamilton's white one, a few rows nearer the stage. "*Peine perdoo*, I'm afraid," she added, with a shrug of her fat shoulders and a complacent glance at her eldest daughter; "dear Daphne doesn't know how to make herself attractive to men of his sort."

Minnie looked down, while the dimples on her cheeks became accentuated and a demure smile overspread her countenance. It is impossible even to conjecture upon what slender grounds the Perkins family had built up a theory that Captain Clough admired Minnie; but they honestly held that belief, and were happy in holding it—for indeed it was an ascertained fact that Captain Clough was very well off.

Whether it was or was not on that account that Mrs. Hamilton cherished the wishes rightly ascribed

to her is another question ; probably she liked her old friend Jack Clough none the less because the recent demise of a distant relative had made a rich man of him. But, be that as it may, she felt almost certain that his own wishes coincided with hers, and she was therefore both vexed and puzzled by his apparently pleased acquiescence in the triumphs of a possible rival. Count von Kahlenburg, to be sure, was not really a rival, not really possible ; still Jack might have been excused for resenting his quickly formed intimacy with Daphne—or rather, was inexcusable for not doing so.

“Thank goodness, that is over!” she exclaimed, when her daughter had once more retired from view and the audience had at length ceased to applaud with all its hands and feet. “It was rather bad taste of your friend, I think, to insist upon dragging her before the curtain, when he must have known quite well that they were calling for him, not for her.”

“Oh, perhaps he didn’t,” said Captain Clough, imperturbably ; “he is a very modest fellow.”

“Is he? I must confess that I shouldn’t have

thought modesty was his most prominent virtue. He acted splendidly, though—which is more than can be said for Daphne.”

“I have seen better actresses,” Clough was fain to admit. “Still I believe she has enjoyed it all, and that is the main thing.”

He spoke with sincerity. To him it appeared eminently desirable that Daphne should enjoy herself, and although he had for some time past been deeply, silently in love with the girl, he was under no illusion as to her sentiments. She looked upon him as a kind, trustworthy, rather elderly friend, and it was most unlikely (not absolutely impossible, perhaps) that she would ever regard him in any other light. Why, then, risk the loss of such share in her affections as he possessed by playing the part of dog in the manger?

“Yes, I suppose she has enjoyed it,” Mrs. Hamilton agreed, in dubious accents. “What I haven’t quite enjoyed is her being made conspicuous in this way. However, as we are off to Bayreuth at once, and shall probably never see this place or these people again—by the way, what becomes of you after we

leave? You have no musical hankerings, I am afraid."

He shook his head. "Oh, I hanker, but I must go home, all the same. Lawyers are clamouring for me, and land agents and gamekeepers, and I don't know what other functionaries connected with the management of a neglected estate. It isn't all roses, this sudden shift from the ammunition boots which fitted one's feet into the uneasy shoes of a county magnate; I often find myself sighing for the old regiment and the old prescribed routine."

"It is better to be rich than to be poor," Mrs. Hamilton declared with conviction, "and you are such an orderly, practical person that you will soon dispose of preliminary bothers. Are we not to meet again, then, until we ourselves go back to London next winter?"

"Well, I was thinking that, if you wouldn't find me a bore, I might possibly allow myself another run abroad during the summer, when you will be at Marienbad."

The company had broken up into groups, and was gradually dispersing. Mrs. Perkins, who had drawn

near, overheard the last word and echoed it in a loud, jubilant voice.

"Marienbad!—are you really thinking of Marienbad, dear Mrs. Hamilton? How delightful it will be if we can arrange dates so as to go through our cures together! I am sent there," she good-humouredly continued, "for reasons which must be only too apparent to everybody—reasons which certainly don't exist in *your* case. It does me some good; I reduced my weight by six pounds last year; still, as the doctor very truly says, I could part with four or five times that amount and never miss it. What time do you suppose will suit you best?—July or August? We aren't tied down to any particular week, or even month."

Mrs. Hamilton who had been upon the point of naming a specific date to Jack Clough, hastened to reply that her plans were as yet quite vague. Jack, of course, could never be a bore; but Mrs. Perkins would assuredly never be anything else, and she could not resist adding a feeble, pathetic protest.

"Don't you think Carlsbad would be better for you? Everybody says that the Carlsbad waters are

a great deal stronger, and six pounds a season doesn't seem much! At that rate——"

"Oh, at that rate, I shall die, no doubt, a heavy woman," Mrs. Perkins philosophically owned; "but, after all, it's a matter of habit, and I'm accustomed to being stout. I would far rather," she went on, with much graciousness, "have the pleasure of being in the same place with you and dear Daphne than take a couple of inches off my waist."

This tiresome persistency was bad enough; but there was worse to come. During the foregoing colloquy Count von Kahlenburg, accompanied by Daphne, had approached from the background, and what was it that that more than exasperating young man was now taking it upon himself to proclaim as coolly as though he had only to announce his intentions? Marienbad would do perfectly—splendidly! His uncle had a property in the neighbourhood which would afford roe-deer shooting and other sport for Clough; he himself had no engagements for the summer months, or only engagements which could be easily set aside—what more simple or more charming than to conclude a general assignation, "now that

we are in one spot and of one mind?" All this with the utmost and most cheerful assurance.

Captain Clough fell back a few paces, laughing under his breath, while Mrs. Hamilton, scared and perturbed, did what in her lay to demonstrate to this audacious youth how little she was of one mind with him. Thus it became possible to ascertain Daphne's views, which were softly communicated to one in whom she had every confidence.

"It would be so nice!—don't you think it would? How unfortunate it is that mother should have taken a dislike to him!"

"Not half as unfortunate—for him—as if you had. The reverse being the evident state of things, one may predict that you and he will get your own way."

Miss Hamilton blushed slightly. That did not prove much, for her colour was always coming and going; but Clough, who knew her face by heart, thought himself capable of knowing her heart by her face, and something told him all that he cared to discover—even a trifle more, perhaps.

"Have no fear," said he; "von Kahlenburg will turn up punctually at Marienbad."

"With you, do you mean?"

"With or without me. My presence is not indispensable, I take it."

"Oh, but indeed, and of course, it is," the girl protested eagerly. "To begin with, we all want you; and then——"

"And then?"

"Well, if you don't come, everything will fall through. Count von Kahlenburg himself sees that. He says he would never have the courage to intrude upon us, without any certainty of being welcome, unless you were there to support him."

So the question of the suggested rendezvous had already been discussed between Daphne and her open admirer! Her secret admirer smiled and kept silence, judging it best to commit himself to no promise. He foresaw, indeed, that he would presently be asked, or ordered, to make promises of a contrary nature, and this expectation was fulfilled while he was conducting Mrs. Hamilton to her carriage.

"Jack," murmured the agitated lady in his ear, "I count upon you to meet us at Marienbad in July. On or about the fifteenth, I think; only you mustn't

say so to Mrs. Perkins. And don't—oh, but *please* don't—bring that very pushing young friend of yours with you."

"I haven't the slightest wish to bring him with me, I assure you," Clough replied truthfully, if somewhat disingenuously.

That his pushing young friend would accompany him, whether he wished it or not, was a foregone conclusion; and, had there been any doubt about the matter, it would have been removed while he was walking towards his hotel, arm in arm with the latter, who ecstatically cried aloud:

"Clough, I adore her!"

"Oh, yes, I know," returned the older man, with composure.

"Ah, you are the most wonderful fellow!—you know things almost before one knows them oneself. Well, then, it is understood, is it not? You will stand by me? For the rest, I shall not let you out of my sight. I was going to England at any rate, and now I shall cleave to you until you start for Marienbad. You will give me the signal as soon as you are ready."

"I don't quite see why I should," said Clough.

"Oh, my dear friend, you certainly see! You see that the mother is not too well disposed towards me, and that your help will be needed. That is why you will not refuse to serve those who appeal to you."

"H'm! I suppose it is. Especially as the appeal seems to be made in the plural number. Well, good-night. I don't want to be told how beautiful and fascinating and adorable Miss Daphne is, thank you; you can tell all that to the stars, who will listen patiently, and won't be guilty of any worse impertinence than an occasional wink."

CHAPTER III.

IMPOTENCE.

"THREE cheers!" cried Mrs. Perkins, with boisterous cordiality. "I was just saying to my girls, 'Now, you may depend upon it, the Hamiltons will turn up, this morning,' and here you are, sure enough! And how are you both?"

Mrs. Hamilton suffered her hand to be gripped and murmured, "How do you do?" resignedly. It is difficult to say why we all find it so offensive to be described as "the So-and-Sos" to our faces, considering that we invariably speak of our acquaintances in that way behind their backs; but poor old Perkins would have been offensive in any case—as offensive as she was, apparently, unavoidable.

"You'll have to fall into line," the good woman went on, quite unconscious of having given umbrage, "with all these thousands of water-drinkers; we

should never get to the springs at all if we didn't form a cue and wait our turn."

Three parallel *queues* of the patient *Curgäste* were advancing, step by step, towards the Kreuzbrunn that crisp, sunny morning, while the band in the neighbouring kiosk played operatic selections to cheer them on their way. At Marienbad, as at all such places, the day begins early, and although the clocks had but just struck seven, everybody was out and about. Natives of the country, for the most part—some yellow-complexioned, some preternaturally obese—with a sprinkling of Russians, Britons and other aliens discernible here and there in the throng; upon the whole not a particularly attractive crowd; but then who or what can look attractive at seven o'clock in the morning? Well, the blue hills, perhaps, and the dark pine woods and the bright, white houses in the foreground. Mrs. Hamilton's eyes sought these, while her ears gave scant attention to the volubility of her fat friend, at whose heels she plodded slowly onwards, glass in hand. Her daughter had been led away by Minnie and Rosie, who presumably stood in no need of healing waters; she

herself must perforce submit for another five minutes or more to the company and conversation of Mrs. Perkins; but it was not, she thought, incumbent upon her to answer categorically the questions which were fired off at her every now and again, or to give a detailed narrative of her movements since her departure from Dresden, three months back.

"Oh, we have been travelling about," she made compendious reply, and then relapsed into silence.

Presently, however, it occurred to her to put a question on her own account—a question couched in accents of mild remonstrance.

"What could have made you expect to see us here this morning? We only arrived last night."

"Ah!" returned Mrs. Perkins, with an arch glance over a massive shoulder, "a little bird whispered to me that you were not far off."

Jack was already at Marienbad, then! Well, that was a relief; the more so because, as his tiresome habit was, he had omitted to acknowledge epistolary reminders.

"I flatter myself," Mrs. Perkins resumed complacently, "that I am rather a good hand at putting

two and two together, and when a certain person appeared upon the scene the day before yesterday, full of anxiety for news of you, I thought, 'Now we are getting warm!—*now* we may look forward to meeting dear Mrs. Hamilton again at any moment!' In point of fact, I took the liberty of promising him as much. He seemed so delighted and so grateful, poor fellow!"

"Indeed?" said Mrs. Hamilton distantly. "He can scarcely have been surprised, though, for I wrote some time ago to tell him that we should be here about the middle of the month."

Mrs. Perkins at any rate was surprised. "Oh!" she ejaculated, with rounded mouth and eyes, "you are in correspondence with him? Dear me!—I didn't know."

There was no reason on earth why Mrs. Hamilton should not correspond with Jack Clough, whom she had known intimately from his childhood; but she did not feel called upon to furnish this inquisitive stranger with explanations. She was enabled immediately after reaching the Kreuzbrunn, with its ministering maidens, to slip away from Mrs. Perkins,

who was accosted at that moment by some Heaven-sent deliverer, and as she stood outside in the sunshine, sipping her rather nauseous draught and gazing down at the parti-coloured assemblage of promenaders in the long alley, she thought to herself, "Delighted and grateful! Well, if he looked like that!—but I can hardly imagine that he did. It is never Jack's way to exhibit his feelings. Sometimes one almost doubts whether he has any."

That doubt seemed, to say the least of it, justifiable a few seconds later when, turning round at the sound of Daphne's voice, she found herself confronted not only by Jack (who did not look like anything—not even like the traitor that he was), but by a radiant young man, who bowed low and hoped Mrs. Hamilton had not forgotten him. As a matter of fact, Mrs. Hamilton had very nearly forgotten Count von Kahlenburg; his name had never been mentioned between her and her daughter during their recent pleasant wanderings, nor had she thought again about his threatened descent upon Marienbad. But at the sight of him her original, instinctive dislike for the man awoke afresh, doubly stimulated

by the swift conviction that he was Mrs. Perkins's "little bird," and that Jack Clough must have guided him to his present place of sojourn. She had to give him her hand and tell him, with frigid civility, that she quite well remembered his excellent histrionic performance at Dresden: what she was altogether powerless to bring about was the discouragement and discomfiture which it was her intention to inflict upon him. He walked along the shady promenade between her and her daughter, conversing with the easy, fluent garrulity of one who does not doubt his welcome, and she was fain to admit that he could talk pleasantly and amusingly enough. He had many acquaintances, native and foreign, amongst the water-drinkers; he told his companions who they all were, and related anecdotes respecting some of them which moved Daphne to ready, girlish laughter, and even extorted the tribute of an occasional smile from the reluctant Mrs. Hamilton. His English was perfect; but then, as he incidentally mentioned, he had lived a good deal in England and delighted in English life. Upon the whole, an amiable, well-bred, well-mannered young man; only—there was that disquieting, insistent

resemblance of his to a dead man who had been young once upon a time, but never amiable, never well-bred nor well-mannered!

By the advice of local physicians a glass of Kreuzbrunn water usually alternates with one from the Ferdinandsbrunn, which latter spring is situated at the opposite extremity of the broad gravelled walk. Arrived at this destination, Mrs. Hamilton effected a change of partners, withdrew Captain Clough from the assiduous attentions of Miss Minnie Perkins, and, on resuming her obligatory march, with the younger division well ahead, fell upon him, tooth and nail.

"Jack, this is too abominable of you! When I so particularly told you that I did *not* want to see any more of your theatrical friend."

"Quite so; but the difficulty consisted in his having particularly told me that he did want to see more of you. One can't hope to please everybody."

"And do you suppose that you will get out of the difficulty by pleasing nobody? I needn't tell you that you don't please me, and I can't see what chance there is of your ultimately pleasing him; for I beg

to assure you, once for all, that nothing would induce me even to contemplate a son-in-law of that nationality."

"Oh, a son-in-law!—your thoughts travel at that pace!"

"Not any faster than yours. Come, Jack!—you must acknowledge that you have thought of that possibility?"

"Well, one contemplates possibilities, of course; but one doesn't mistake them for certainties. Likewise, one endeavours, as I hinted just now, to please somebody, and I flatter myself that I have at least pleased Daphne. Whether Otto von Kahlenburg will please her to the extent that you fear remains to be seen; but I can imagine nothing wiser than giving him the opportunity. We all know what familiarity sometimes breeds."

"Ah!—but are you really so clever as all that?"

"Perhaps I am not so stupid as to let them sigh for one another apart. Moreover, he is constantly in London; you couldn't, in any case, have prevented him from looking you up, if he were bent upon looking you up."

"But she hasn't been sighing at all!"

"So much the better."

"Yes; only why not have left well alone? Daphne, I really believe, has been thinking of nothing but music all this time. The operas that we have listened to!—and the symphonies and the recitals! The very memory gives me a headache; though of course I was glad that she should have so much enjoyment. Well, I trust, at all events, that your friend is not musical."

"I can't say for certain; but naturally he will pretend to be. Who knows whether that pretence may not work his undoing? Meanwhile, let us not worry. We are impotent, or almost so, remember, and what is to be will be."

Mrs. Hamilton, albeit no fatalist, was well aware of her impotence in certain directions. The desire of her heart was that Jack Clough and her daughter should fancy one another; but she could not make them do that, and she was pretty sure that, so far as he was concerned, efforts were needless. It only remained to hope that he was the wily diplomatist he appeared to set up for being, and to let Daphne

discover for herself what a very ordinary personage this young von Kahlenburg was.

Unfortunately, such discoveries are not always made by those best situated for making them, nor can the most ordinary young man alive be considered safe from idealisation in the eyes of this or that maiden. Only a few days were required to convince the distressed and apprehensive Mrs. Hamilton that her daughter was as liable as another to succumb to the attractions of the commonplace. A comely countenance, a simple, manly bearing, a flattering mixture of deference and profound admiration—these attributes, however small their intrinsic worth, have sufficed from time immemorial to captivate feminine hearts. And what countervailing measures can be adopted in a place like Marienbad, where everybody necessarily meets everybody else half a dozen times between sunrise and sunset. Count Otto met Miss Daphne daily while the dew was still on the grass, met her again at the Waldquelle, whither her mother was bound to repair at half-past eleven, lunched in her company towards mid-day (for restaurants are open to all the world), attended her on long walks

through the pine-forests during the afternoon, and partook by her side of the late dinner which, though contrary to rule, the doctor had sanctioned as a concession to British custom. It is true that on these occasions the presence of Mrs. Hamilton and Captain Clough, not to speak of the doggedly determined Perkins family, gave little or no opportunity for solitary intercourse; yet progress was made and encouragement was unquestionably vouchsafed.

"Mark my words," said Mrs. Perkins solemnly to her daughter, "all this will end in at least one engagement."

Minnie simpered, lowered her eyelids and wondered aloud what Mamma could mean by more than one. Mrs. Hamilton and Captain Clough could have told her, had they thought it worth while, but in truth neither of them had much attention to spare for absurd side-issues.

CHAPTER IV.

RESIGNATION.

JACK CLOUGH was an oldish man for his years. He was conscious of this and of the disabilities entailed upon him thereby ; but even if he had not recognised the humiliating fact of his having already, in Daphne's estimation, reached the confines of middle age, he would still have had common sense enough to perceive that the girl had never so much as thought of him in the light of a suitor for her hand. A certain natural refinement and scrupulousness had restrained Mrs. Hamilton (to whom he was duly grateful) from thus representing him to her daughter, and his secret, so far as he could see, was likely to be kept till the end of the chapter. That, under these circumstances, he should have been more anxious for Daphne's happiness than his own, and willing to promote the former at the expense of the latter, may seem to prove conclusively that he could

not in reality have been very deeply in love; but human emotions have the strangest complications and developments. Certain, at all events, it is that he received with patience the confidences of Count Otto, who poured these into his ears at great length every evening.

The young man was inclined to be sanguine. Respecting his relations with the object of his passion he was modestly reticent: Clough, having eyes to see, could judge for himself whether they were progressing favourably or not. But from the outset he had realised the importance of overcoming Mrs. Hamilton's undisguised hostility, and his strenuous exertions to that end were beginning, he believed, to bear fruit.

"She has the air," he said, "of becoming resigned. Oh, as for liking me, no!—she does not like me. But I have observed that of late she has ceased to stare at me as if she suspected me of being a *chevalier d'industrie*, which is so much gained. I think also that in the last resort she will not have the heart to oppose her daughter, whom she loves—as who would not!"

"You may take that for certain," said Clough, quietly.

"Well, I hope I may. Although it is evident that she has plans for her daughter's future which I am sure your sober old head has never divined. Happily, they have no better prospect of success than the plans of our excellent Mrs. Perkins and Miss Minnie, with whom, my dear friend, you should walk more warily. You walk with her too much—oh, but indeed too much!—and in the moonlight too, you old rascal!"

A jocose poke in the ribs emphasised this accusation, to which the other responded: "I can lay my hand on the place where my heart ought to be and swear that I would never walk with Miss Perkins under moon or sun if I could help it; but it seems necessary that I should walk with somebody, and the delicacy of Mrs. Perkins and Rosie, combined with your recent tactics, leaves me only one available partner."

Von Kahlenburg laughed. "Cheer up, old man!" said he consolingly; "you shall have a holiday—two or three holidays if you like. I have made all

arrangements now with my uncle's forester, and you have only to fix your own date."

He had made all arrangements for the promised shooting expedition, save that he himself (for obvious reasons) proposed to take no part in it. His English friend, however, being no longer indispensable at Marienbad, could be granted leave of absence and provided with company in the shape of sundry noble sportsmen from Vienna, to whom Captain Clough was in due course presented. With these cheery and affable comrades the superfluous one enjoyed some very fair sport in the adjacent pine-forests, bringing down his share of driven roe-deer and returning at the end of three days with a mixed bag, a sunburnt nose and a new narrow-brimmed hat, the gift of one of the party, which was adorned at the back by the beard of a chamois and on the side by a blackcock's tail-feathers.

Then it was that the reality of Mrs. Hamilton's resignation was made manifest to him. She had not yet given in; but she was giving in, and almost admitted that she was.

"How am I to fight against fate single-handed?"

she plaintively asked. "Your desertion of me amounts to acquiescence in my defeat."

"No number of helping hands would have enabled you to conquer fate," he sensibly returned; "as I told you the first day, what is to be will be."

"Yes, I remember your saying so—true, if rather depressing. But the truth generally is depressing, isn't it? You mentioned at the same time that he was either musical or would pretend to be, which has turned out to be likewise true."

"And likewise depressing?"

"Oh, not to Daphne. Between ourselves, I confess that the prospect of a cross-country journey back to Bayreuth for the sake of seeing *Parsifal* a third time is rather depressing to me; but since they are both bent upon it, and since the doctor says that there will be no harm in my interrupting my 'cure' for a couple of days . . . I suppose *you* wouldn't be persuaded to come with us? The Perkins trio, I may tell you, will not be included in our party."

Possibly dread of being abandoned, alone and unprotected, to Minnie Perkins for forty-eight hours may have moved him to assent; but it was more

likely that he was influenced by an appeal from Daphne, who joined him and her mother at this moment, and to whose requests he never knew how to turn a deaf ear. Her motives for desiring his society at and on the journey to Bayreuth were as evident as they were personally unflattering; yet he took no offence. Without figure of speech, he counted it a privilege to serve her.

To educated and discriminating persons the privilege of witnessing a performance which can only be witnessed in a sleepy town of Upper Franconia is doubtless a high one and worth the high price which tickets for the same command, when purchased at the last moment; but Captain Clough's love for music did not extend much beyond appreciation of melody; so that the first act of *Parsifal*, which stirred the lady who sat on his right hand to visible enthusiasm and seemed to satisfy the soul of her on his left, ended by boring him more than a little. He recognised, indeed, the marvellous beauty of certain orchestral passages, admired (with a few mental reservations) the skilful stage management, and was impressed—as everybody, on visiting that unique play-

house for the first time, must be—by the breathless silence and attention of the vast audience. But that interminable recitative was more than he could stand. "I can't for the life of me," he whispered to Mrs. Hamilton, who occupied the place on his left, "see what music has to do with the monotonous noise produced by a couple of personages, standing there and shouting at one another till all's blue!"

Mrs. Hamilton, with a slight smile, laid her finger upon her lips and glanced meaningly at Daphne. Well, he could contentedly imitate her there, at all events; he could derive a great deal of pleasure from watching Daphne, if he was no longer able to concentrate his faculties upon stage or orchestra. She was in truth worth looking at, with her parted lips, her luminous eyes, her incomparable profile—and so young von Kahlenburg, who was seated beyond her, appeared to think. His ingenuous profile (comparable to half a hundred others) expressed a homage and admiration which were probably not offered to the deceased composer, although he was ready with an intelligent nod as often as his fair neighbour, touched by some vocal

or instrumental effect, turned her face towards him for a moment. A bit of a humbug he may have been, a less ardent worshipper of Wagner than of Daphne Hamilton, no doubt; yet he was at least capable of entering into her feelings, whether he shared them or not. Very plain it was to the unobserved observer that they understood one another, those two, and—what more would you have? "For my own part," he thought to himself, with a rueful, inaudible laugh, "I could do with rather less."

But he was willing in his stoical, philosophical fashion to endure what, as he was now convinced, could not be cured. When the curtain had fallen and the strangely silent audience had quitted the theatre to emerge upon the sunny hill-top where it stands, Daphne, with the last echoes of the "*Gralsmotiv*" still ringing in her ears, turned and asked, "Well, are you not glad you came?"

"Oh, yes, I'm glad," he answered; "one is always glad to increase one's stock of knowledge. I was more or less of an ignoramus when I started, but I am fully enlightened now."

"Already!" she smilingly exclaimed.

She was not, he observed, at the pains to seek for any hidden meaning in his words, nor, it appeared, did she care to continue the conversation. Otto was at her elbow, eager to draw her away into the adjoining woodlands, whither the horde of native and alien pilgrims to that Bavarian shrine were strolling in groups and couples. Mrs. Hamilton and Jack had coffee together in front of one of the neighbouring restaurants, while the sun sank in the west and the shades of evening began to fall. Mrs. Hamilton was tired—conscious also, perhaps, of the futility of pursuit. She did not even suggest the functions of a sheep-dog to her companion, but contented herself with making inquiries about the von Kahlenburg family—a distinguished and moderately wealthy family, his knowledge of them enabled him to inform her.

Daphne reappeared with her cavalier before the time came to return to the theatre. They had been discussing music, the girl said, and she certainly did not look as if she had been engaged upon any less impersonal topic. Otto, on the other hand, was slightly flushed, visibly nervous and anxious. He

had been endeavouring, it might be conjectured, to introduce personal topics and had been met in a discouraging spirit.

But the opportunity for which he was in such a hurry was bound to come later in the evening. Clough foresaw that it would, and was half inclined to comfort him with an ironical assurance to that effect. It came, even sooner than might have been anticipated, at the termination of the second act—that disillusioning second act, ushered in by the eldritch squall of the wizard-summoned Kundry and passing on to the very Teutonic Garden of Delight, with its buxom *Blumenmädchen*, which the most humble and least critical of spectators must find it hard to take seriously. “I am sure I should like all this so much better if there were no stage and no human voices!” sighed Clough as he made his way out.

“I should like it better if there were no audience,” returned Mrs. Hamilton, jostled by a famished crowd in headlong flight to secure dinner-tables.

“But *we* don’t want food,” Daphne declared; “who could be hungry at such a moment and on

such an exquisite night? We will have supper at the hotel when it is all over."

"Speak for yourself, my dear child," her mother plaintively rejoined. "It may be vulgar and coarse of me, but it is a fact nevertheless that I am fainting for want of food."

"Dear mother!—then you shall be fed, of course! Captain Clough will look after you, I know. As for me, I must have moonlight, and the smell of the pines; I couldn't just now face gas and beer and the clatter of plates and tongues."

"I wonder," said Jack Clough, after he had seized upon a small table, and had ministered to Mrs. Hamilton's cravings, "whether that healthy young man has renounced his beef and beer without a pang."

"Oh, I should think so," she resignedly, if a trifle snappishly, answered; "but you ought to know. You yourself are a pretty good hand at renunciation, it seems to me."

He shrugged his shoulders; he was a pretty good hand at accepting the unavoidable, perhaps. His old friend, as he was well aware, was not that; only

she was sure to yield—always had yielded and always would yield—to her daughter. In the present instance she would not, so far as he could see, have reason to repent of her pliancy; for Otto von Kahlenburg, when all was said, had most of the qualities which are to be desired in a son-in-law. He lighted a cigarette, when the scrambling meal had been disposed of, and awaited events with outward composure.

Mrs. Hamilton, for her part, was neither composed nor fond of being kept waiting. Her daughter's protracted absence began to agitate her long before there was any need for disquietude, and by the time that other diners were once more trooping towards the theatre she had worked herself up into a state of serious alarm.

"Something must have happened!" she exclaimed. "Do go and look for them, Jack; it is so unlike Daphne to be late on an occasion like this!"

Jack obediently started in search of the truants, of whom, however, he could see nothing in the neighbourhood of the theatre. He was not himself alarmed, although he thought it more than probable

that something had happened—something which had been obviously about to happen, and which would quite account for Daphne's omission to consult her watch.

"What *are* we to do?" cried Mrs. Hamilton distressfully, when he returned to report his failure.

"Well, if you ask me," he replied, "I should say that our best course would be to go back to our seats, like other people. Then, at any rate, Daphne will be spared the trouble of looking for us. She is not lost, you may depend upon it; we may even find that she has gone before."

"But if she hasn't?"

"In that case let us hope that she will soon see the propriety of following after."

Mrs. Hamilton made a despairing gesture. "Oh, the less said about propriety the better! And you don't seem to think that it matters a bit! *Why* don't you think that it matters?"

"Because it doesn't," answered Jack. "Come in and sit down, or we shall disturb this fastidious assemblage—which would matter quite scandalously, I suppose?"

CHAPTER V.

IDENTIFICATION.

AFTER all, as Clough had predicted, but had hardly expected, the missing pair were discovered in their places. Conversation is, of course, quite incompatible with the reverent attitude which pilgrims to Bayreuth are supposed to maintain from the moment that they enter the quasi-sacred edifice; but a brief whispered explanation was vouchsafed to Jack, who as briefly passed it on to Mrs. Hamilton. Daphne and von Kahlenburg had wandered rather farther than they were aware, it seemed; they had only just had time to retrace their steps, and had thought it best to make straight for the theatre. "We were sure you would understand," the girl added.

For the matter of that, her neighbour was pretty sure—not absolutely sure—that he did understand.

His intense, subdued anxiety to make sure spoiled the magnificent last act of *Parsifal* for him, without bringing him the compensating enlightenment which he craved. What safe conclusion, indeed, could be drawn from Daphne's delicately heightened colour or from her air of rapt beatitude? The musical enthusiast that she was might be made to look like that by mere squeak of fiddles, blare of trumpets or uproar of blended human voices, and as a matter of fact, she never once removed her eyes from the stage. The speaking countenance of Otto von Kahlenburg was more likely, perhaps, to betray secrets; but this was but faintly discernible in the half-darkness, and all that could be ascertained for certain about him was that his attention, in common with that of somebody else, was concentrated upon an object close at hand.

"Well, we shall know more before we are much older, I presume," reflected somebody else, taking patience, as his habit was.

He had need of patience; for no revelations were made, or even hinted at, during the swift drive down the Bürgerreuther Strasse after all was over. Daphne,

evidently in a high mood of exaltation, talked a great deal; but her talk related exclusively to the concluded performance, and was of too technical a character to be participated in by her companions, who wisely limited themselves to respectful, assenting grunts. The carriage swept out of the long avenue, clattering through the roughly-paved streets and drew up at the door of the hotel. Did Otto, who assisted the ladies to alight, hold Miss Hamilton's hand rather longer than the occasion warranted? If he did, that proved nothing: he would scarcely have neglected such a chance, whether she was or was not a consenting party.

But what, in the bright light of the inn parlour and at the hastily-spread supper table, became increasingly evident, was that some change—more or less subtle—had supervened in the mutual relations of the two young people. Their careful avoidance of addressing one another directly gave sufficient proof of that, while their fugitive embarrassment when (as naturally happened every now and again) their eyes met told a too easily legible tale. In short, if they were not already bound by a formal matrimonial

engagement, they were going to be; and Mrs. Hamilton visibly knew it.

Mrs. Hamilton knew it so well that she was moved to compassion for the defeated suitor, whose supineness in fighting his own battle had hitherto been a source of no small provocation to her. "My poor Jack," she seemed to say; "you have brought this upon yourself and it serves you right; but, for all that, I am as sorry as you can be, if not sorrier. Let us mingle our tears and bury our differences, since there is nothing else left for us to do." Such, at least, was the interpretation which he placed upon her softened manner in helping him to cold chicken and her gently breathed sighs into his ear. In the long run Daphne was fatally certain to get her own way with them both: it had been ever thus, and there was no help for it, however desirable a man of Captain Clough's unblemished character and unexceptionable social position might be—however undesirable a vaguely vouched-for young foreigner.

Not without pathos were the poor lady's incidental essays to get hold of something a little more tangible in the way of vouchers. The transition from Wagner's

superiority over all predecessors in the art of operatic composition to Count Otto von Kahlenburg's precise status in Viennese Court circles does not, at first sight, seem easy of accomplishment ; yet (through deft allusion to the royal patrons of the deceased master and inquiries as to who were and who were not eligible for Royal patronage in a country where rigid class distinctions still reign supreme) Mrs. Hamilton contrived to effect it—with results fairly reassuring. It was only Daphne who, in her impatience with non-musical topics, prevented the young man from giving all the information for which he was indirectly solicited ; he himself had nothing to conceal. He was indisputably *hoffähig*, and the unmarried uncle whose heir presumptive he was had held more than one high official post. Mrs. Hamilton's curiosity may have been, and probably was, quite intelligible to him ; he gratified it, as often as her daughter would allow him to do so, with the simplest candour.

"Oh, in the matter of titles," he said, answering some random query, "it is not with us as it is with you ; with us, generally speaking, the whole family

is called after the head of the family. For example, my uncle, when he succeeded, through the female line, to his estates, became Graf von Kahlenburg, and I am therefore Otto von Kahlenburg; but my father, who lost his life by an accident in Tyrol many years ago, was never von Kahlenburg; he bore another name."

"Your father—lost his life—in Tyrol—by an accident!"

Jack Clough, who had hitherto been listening with languid amusement to Mrs. Hamilton's fishing interrogatories, turned his head quickly towards her, startled by the hoarse, gasping voice in which she brought out these words. She had turned as white as the tablecloth, he noticed.

"Yes," answered the young man, who was at the moment engaged in filling Daphne's glass, "he was killed by a fall over a precipice in one of the mountain passes, and my mother did not survive him a year. I can scarcely say that I remember either of them; I have been an orphan and the adopted son of my uncle almost from infancy."

"Ah!—I see. And your father's name was——"

"His name was von Pardowitz. We retain that name, indeed, although we do not use it."

"Ah!" ejaculated Mrs. Hamilton again; "how—how curious!"

It struck her neighbour that she did not very well know what she was saying; it struck him also that she was upon the very verge of fainting away. But with a really fine bid for self-mastery she gripped the edge of the table hard, maintained some sort of a countenance and went on:

"Curious, I mean, to have two names . . . Most people have only one . . . then one knows who they are" . . .

She broke off, laughing oddly, conscious perhaps that she was beginning to talk nonsense, or worse. Daphne jumped up, and hurried round the table, just in time to catch her mother, whose head fell heavily upon her shoulder. Concerned waiters gathered round, Mrs. Hamilton's maid was summoned in haste, restoratives were employed; in a few minutes she was able to sit up once more and beg everybody's pardon for having behaved so ridiculously. "Wagner," she pleaded, with a wry smile, "is always

so terribly exhausting to feeble brains! If you will only go on eating, all of you, and kindly ignore me, I won't do it again."

But of course Daphne would not hear of so heartless a method of treatment. She and the maid between them led the faintly protesting Mrs. Hamilton away, and if the two men who were left in possession of the supper-table wanted to go on eating, they were at liberty to indulge their appetites without fear of interruption. The younger, however, was much too agitated to give any further attention to mere physical exigencies.

"What does it mean? Why was she so upset all of a sudden?" he anxiously asked the elder. "Could it have been anything that I said, do you think?"

Jack Clough felt very little doubt as to that; but he was a man of cautious temperament, besides being Mrs. Hamilton's old and trusted friend.

"Interesting, and even tragic, as your reminiscences of childhood were," he disingenuously replied, "they were scarcely of so harrowing a nature as to make your hearers swoon. Compose yourself; it is far more likely that indigestion was responsible than that

you were. I am suffering a little from indigestion myself—and so would you be, if you had partaken of that fearsome, greasy meal outside the *Festspielhaus* which you so cunningly evaded.”

Von Kahlenburg was but partially reassured. He fidgetted restlessly about the room; he seemed to be upon the point of making some communication, which, however, he was not encouraged to utter; finally, he wanted to know whether it would be permissible to knock softly at Mrs. Hamilton’s door and enquire how she was.

His companion opined that it certainly would not. “My dear fellow, women are always having these slight attacks of indisposition, and nothing annoys them more than being questioned about their health. Come outside and smoke a cigar; you will find Mrs. Hamilton as brisk as a bee at breakfast time to-morrow.”

But neither Mrs. nor Miss Hamilton appeared at breakfast the next morning. The latter sent, instead, a short, pencilled missive to Captain Clough, in which she stated that her mother, though much better, was not feeling quite fit for a railway journey yet.

Another twenty-four hours of complete rest would be sure to set her right; only she must have rest; "and I am to beg *most particularly* that you and Count von Kahlenburg will go back to Marienbad without us. Please, don't think this a rude request, and *please* don't hesitate to comply with it."

Von Kahlenburg hesitated a good deal—even went the length of declaring that he could not and would not do as he was told. Nevertheless, obedience was eventually imposed upon him by his resolute friend, who pointed out that when a lady asks you to make yourself scarce there is but one course for you to adopt, whether you like it or not. "Moreover," added this patient counsellor, "I doubt whether you will ingratiate yourself with Mrs. Hamilton or her daughter by becoming a nuisance to them. Come! pack up your portmanteau, and we'll start. After all, they are bound to follow soon, you must remember; for I take it that they didn't bring many changes of raiment to Bayreuth with them."

CHAPTER VI.

FLIGHT.

JACK CLOUGH had a rather trying time of it, both during the return journey to Marienbad and on the day which followed his reappearance with his young friend amongst the frequenters of that charming health resort. Under no circumstances can it be enjoyable to be beset by the incessant, reiterated, senseless doubts and queries of an uneasy lover; and when one happens to be oneself in love with the object of one's tormentor's solicitude, one must be a saint, or little short of it, to refrain from punching the fellow's silly head. But von Kahlenburg's head escaped assault. Jack, who, if not a saint, was at least a practical philosopher, bore with exemplary patience what had to be borne—bore even to be dragged all the way down to the distant railway station, under a broiling sun, towards evening, in order to meet two ladies who almost certainly would

not like being met, and who, as it turned out, were undiscoverable in the crowd of arriving passengers from the Bavarian frontier. He endured, moreover, consequent reproaches which he had in no wise earned.

"My dear man," he kept on repeating, "what in the world is there to make such a fuss about? I don't suppose that they have the least wish to run away and leave you lamenting; but even if they had, they couldn't do it. Can't you realise that we hold their clothes in pawn?"

Now, it is doubtless a fact that no woman, save under pressure of the direst necessity, will consent to be parted from her clothes; yet there is no absolute necessity for discharging in person a mission which may be just as well accomplished by deputy. Captain Clough had overlooked a contingency which might have suggested itself to him, and a discomfited man was he when the next morning's post brought him the following letter:

"Gasthof zum Anker, Bayreuth.

"MY DEAR JACK,—

"My maid has just returned from Marienbad, bringing our things, which I sent her to fetch, and

I write these few lines in a hurry to say how sorry I am to think that we shall not meet again before the autumn. Yes, I must renounce my 'cure' for this season—I daresay you will understand why. This seemed to afford such an occasion, such an excuse, for silent retreat, and really I *couldn't* have brought myself to the point of accepting—you know whom! I am thankful to say that as yet there is *no great harm done*. Dear Daphne makes quite light of it all, and we set forth in a few hours for—but no. You are so queer, so good-natured, so unlike anybody else, that I positively dare not mention our destination, lest we should be followed—but not by you! It is all very tiresome; still I do feel that things might have been much worse. Good-bye; you will find us at home once more by November next, at latest, and in the meantime I am

“Always your attached old friend,

“MARY HAMILTON.”

That the recipient of this announcement should have been discomfited by it may surely be accounted

to him for righteousness, seeing that it was in itself of a nature to revive his well-nigh extinct hopes. For if Daphne did indeed, as was alleged, "make light of it all," why should one who made light of nothing that concerned her despair? But Jack Clough's queerness, good nature and lack of resemblance to anybody else were manifested by his rubbing his nose perplexedly, instead of jumping for joy, and by his subdued murmur of "Well, this is pleasant! Now, I wonder how I am to break the news gently to that rampageous youngster!"

Otto von Kahlenburg justified the above description of himself, and rendered further deliberation superfluous, by incontinently flinging the door open and crying aloud: "Good God, Clough! they are gone—they have left the place!"

"So Mrs. Hamilton writes to inform me," observed the other. "You have been round to their rooms, then?"

"I have been to their rooms—their empty rooms!" the young man tragically replied, while he sank down upon the nearest chair. He covered his face with his hands for a moment, then started to his feet

once more and resumed, with tremulous excitement :
"What am I to think? Is this a preconcerted plot, and are you in it? If so——"

"If so, you will run me through the body, eh? But I am as innocent as the babe unborn, and you can't fight a duel with Mrs. Hamilton, even though she may have the bad taste to find you and me and Marienbad wearisome."

"Is that what she says? Let me see her letter, Clough—I have a right to see it!"

"Oh, excuse me," returned Jack, stowing the sheet away in his breast-pocket; "you can't possibly have any right to examine my correspondence. You may or may not have other rights; it is difficult to pronounce an opinion without knowing what you take them to be."

"The right of being morally certain that she loves me! I don't mean Mrs. Hamilton, who—for some reason or no reason—appears to hate me."

"Of course you don't mean Mrs. Hamilton. But how about that moral certainty? You imply that you haven't been told as much in so many words."

He admitted that he had not. The wood sur-

rounding the Bayreuth theatre had heard no specific avowal—or at all events none from the lips of Daphne Hamilton, who, when under the sway of musical enthusiasm, was apt to be as deaf and as absent-minded as it suited her to be. But, for all that, he was sure! And it was not her ostensible readiness to leave him in the lurch (of which it was deemed advisable to make him aware) that should deter him from starting in instant pursuit of her—no, not though she should have been spirited away to the world's end! His long-suffering confidant had a good deal of trouble with him; was compelled, in the long run, to tell him that Mrs. Hamilton had divined and disapproved of his suit.

“But what then? If you are as sure as you say you are, you can afford to wait; whereas I really don't think that you can afford to persecute people who go so far as to refuse their address to an old friend for fear of exposing themselves to your importunities. Do as you choose; I can't prevent you from starting upon a chase which will probably prove unsuccessful, even if you run your quarry to earth. But my advice, supposing I wanted you to succeed

—which I am not yet prepared to affirm that I do—would be to trust to time. You are going to shoot and hunt in England next winter, are you not?”

“Yes; but—next winter!”

“If you count the interval in weeks, it won’t seem so long. And then there is another thing to be considered. I take it that you are dependent upon your uncle for an income.”

“Naturally; but if you imagine that my uncle would not hasten to incline himself before Miss Hamilton’s beauty and refinement and——”

“Oh, I don’t imagine anything so outrageous as that. Still, the fact remains that the Hamiltons are not connected with the various noble families which bear their surname, and yours is a prejudiced aristocracy. Anyhow, it might be as well to present yourself in England fortified by Count von Kahlenburg’s support.”

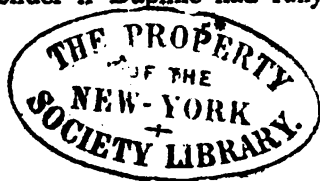
The young man pensively agreed that it might. In truth, he could not but perceive—now that he came to think of it—the peril of confronting the head of the family with an accomplished fact. After protracted subsequent parley, which brought him no fresh

enlightenment as to the cause of a desertion which he still felt to be inexplicable, he proclaimed his intention of leaving forthwith for the Salzkammergut, where his uncle was then residing. Of course, he said, he could no longer endure the sight of bereaved Marienbad.

Marienbad, insensible of bereavement, basked in the sunshine, dazzlingly white, refreshingly green, softly blue, for the benefit of sauntering thousands who neither knew or cared what had become of the violet-eyed English girl, although most of them had noticed and paid silent homage to her. One of the least obtrusive of her devotees sallied forth presently, and, circumventing the Waldquelle, with its braying band and gaily-attired crowd, plunged into the cool depths of the forest beyond. Beneath the shade of those towering, straight-stemmed spruce firs—pierced only here and there by slant shafts of sunlight, and silent, save for the faint, continuous murmur of the breeze far overhead—it was possible to review the situation quietly and decide, if necessary, upon future courses of action. But indeed there was no necessity for action, immediate or ultimate. If

there had—as it would appear that there had—been painful passages in Mrs. Hamilton's past life connected with the von Kahlenburg or von Pardowitz family, these were unlikely to exercise a permanent influence upon her daughter's destiny. Clough, who was not inquisitive, shrugged his shoulders, and did not care to waste time upon conjecturing their nature. There are past passages in everybody's life, which as a rule possess neither interest nor importance for the succeeding generation. The only question that signified was whether Daphne had or had not lost her heart to the lovelorn Otto, and to this the evidence required for a positive reply must be pronounced insufficient.

"What is as plain as a pikestaff," muttered the cogitator as he plodded uphill, with his hands behind his back, "is that she hasn't lost her heart to poor me; so it doesn't make much odds, one way or the other. I should be glad, it's true, if she were still fancy-free, but I can't help it if she isn't. Moreover, her mother won't be able to help it if she once makes up her mind to contract a foreign alliance. As for disappearing, it's out of the question to disappear nowadays; I shouldn't wonder if Daphne had fully



realised that much. Look at it how you will, the unavoidable conclusion is that she will please herself in the long run—and quite right too!”

His meditations and his ascending trudge brought him finally to a clearing in the dark woods—one of those innumerable points of view which the corpulent patrons of Marienbad are urged by their physicians to visit between drinking hours, and where benches of weight-resisting construction are provided for the afflicted (who, nevertheless, break them down from time to time). Sounds of heavy stertorous panting, mingled with cackling laughter and ejaculations in his mother tongue, might have warned the intruder off, if he had had ears to ear; but for the moment he had clean forgotten the existence of the Perkinses, and thus, before he knew where he was, he found himself in their midst.

Instantly he was assailed with shrill cries of welcome. “Oh, Captain Clough, how delightful of you to drop from the clouds like this!—*now* we shall hear all about it! We looked for you everywhere at the band, and we were beginning to be afraid that you had run away too. Count von Kahlenburg would

tell us nothing that we hadn't already found out for ourselves. We are *so* mystified, and *so* sorry! Please sit down and explain. Did dear Daphne refuse him?—or was it Mrs. Hamilton who swept her off at a moment's notice?"

To these and a prolonged bombardment of similar queries the luckless man kept on doggedly responding, "I don't know—I don't know." But he might almost as well have revealed at once all that he did know; for the ingenuity of his tormentors was equal to their curiosity, and he laboured under the disadvantage of being constitutionally truthful. It did not take Mrs. Perkins and her daughters very long to ascertain from what he left unsaid that their suspicions were well founded, and that it was Mrs. Hamilton, not Daphne, who had nipped a promising romance in the bud. So extraordinary of her to turn up her nose at a genuine Count of the Holy Roman Empire, with an unblemished pedigree and splendid expectations!

For the rest, they were not ill-natured; only vulgar, officious and abnormally thick-skinned. Their victim, perceiving that he would never shake them off by

anything short of gross insult, resigned himself to walking down the hill in their company—or rather in that of the archly-glancing Minnie, to whom he was somewhat ostentatiously handed over. Rosie skipped on ahead, escorted by a British hobbledehoy whom she had annexed ; Mrs. Perkins followed alone, at a foot's pace, which broke into a lumbering canter in steep places ; Minnie, loitering to adjust a shoelace, was enabled to converse freely with Captain Clough, and made such use of her privileges as his inattention would permit. Without being attentive in any sense of the term, he yet gathered from her remarks that she had a genuine affection for Daphne—likewise that, in her opinion, Daphne had a genuine affection for von Kahlenburg. Asked how she knew that, she laughed and replied, "Oh, one can always tell."

Not always, perhaps ; but in a case where Miss Minnie Perkins's own affections were concerned it might be surmised that very little room would be left for misapprehension. By what unworthy methods Jack Clough extorted from her a promise that she would not chatter about the Hamiltons, and that, so

far as in her lay, she would restrain her mother and her sister from chattering, cannot be recorded here without unkindness to a well-intentioned man. The colloquy terminated at the foot of the hill with a soul-subduing glance from Minnie's round eyes and a gentle murmur of "*You* won't give us the slip, *will* you?"

"Won't I though!" thought Jack, who bowed low and made no articulate response.

He gave them the slip that same afternoon, making straight for England. It would not have been very difficult for him to discover Mrs. Hamilton's whereabouts; nor, as he was well aware, had she intended it to be difficult. But something—a mistaken notion of chivalry, it might be, or an exaggerated diffidence— withheld him from telegraphing to London for her address. "Daphne doesn't want me," he said to himself—as though that unquestionable fact were in any way relevant! He did not, it will be perceived, deserve success and was most unlikely to obtain it.

CHAPTER VII.

FRIENDSHIP.

ON a chilly, murky November afternoon Mrs. Hamilton was toasting her toes before the fire in Palace Gate, where she lived, when Captain Clough was announced. She started up, with a little cry of pleased surprise which her visitor ought to have found flattering.

"At last! I was beginning to despair of you. What have you been about these hundred years?"

"Well," he replied, "for these hundred days past—it is just about that length of time since we parted at Bayreuth, isn't it?—I have been mostly shooting. My record is much too monotonous to interest anybody; but I should like to hear yours. What have you been doing meanwhile?"

"You might," returned Mrs. Hamilton, resuming her seat, "have had the curiosity to ask that question by post. Perhaps you don't realise what a dangerous

thing it is to break off a course of Marienbad treatment before it is half finished."

"I may not have realised all the dangers of the situation ; but I owe you no apology, considering that you refused me all information as to your movements. However, let me repeat my question, now that you are here and I am here. What have you been doing ? "

"Oh, very little worthy of mention. Recovering, I suppose."

"Both of you ? "

Mrs. Hamilton sighed, laughed and nodded. "Yes, both of us, I am thankful to say. At least, I quite hope and believe so. But—we were terribly near a catastrophe, weren't we ? "

"I don't know. We certainly seemed to be within measurable distance of an event—catastrophic or otherwise, according to the point of view. I can't say that, from my point of view, there is anything to take exception to in Otto von Kahlenburg."

"Oh, Jack, don't be so exasperating! It stands to reason that you must have taken exception to him ; though I daresay you may not have disliked

him as much as I did. Anyhow, we have done with the man for good and all now, I trust."

"H'm! And Miss Daphne?"

"She has dismissed him from her mind. You know—or probably you don't know—how easily girls take fancies and get rid of them."

"Some girls, no doubt; but is she of that sort?"

"There is only one sort," Mrs. Hamilton boldly declared. "Infinitely varied, of course, like a packet of mixed seed, but the same in essentials. Daphne's distinctive peculiarity, for instance, is her mania for music—she has gone out to take a violin lesson now, by the way. Well, I suppose he understood that, and took measures accordingly. But from the moment that she had left him and Bayreuth behind her——"

"She proved her resemblance to the rest of the species by forgetting all about him? You are not too complimentary to your only child."

"All I said was that, like other girls, she is liable to take fancies which come to nothing. Would you really have preferred to hear that this one had come to something?"

"No; since you ask me, I shouldn't. Only I

don't feel as convinced about the matter as you profess to be."

Mrs. Hamilton did her best to convince him—not wholly in vain. To be sure, he had seen Daphne's eyes. He had noted a subtle change in her voice, reserved for von Kahlenburg, and he knew what he knew; yet the fact remained that she had obeyed orders and had turned her back upon her Austrian admirer without a protest. Would she have proved so docile if she had been anything like seriously enamoured of that ardent, but casual, *prétendant*? His estimate of Miss Daphne's character warranted a negative reply. Then, too, it was consoling and encouraging to hear that she had frequently wondered whether he was going to be in London at all that winter.

Equally consoling and encouraging to Mrs. Hamilton was the information which she elicited that Captain Clough intended to be in London, off and on, for some time to come. This satisfied her that he must have other other intentions of a nature to command her warmest sympathy, and although they were neither of them so indiscreet as to become more

explicit, they understood one another pretty well before their chat came to an end. Each, at all events, understood very well what the other wanted, and would, if possible, bring to pass.

But there are things which cannot, with the best will in the world, be brought to pass. Had Jack Clough not been aware of that already, he would have been made aware of it, a few minutes after he had emerged into the raw outer air, by his encounter with a young lady, carrying a violin-case, who joyfully recognised and accosted him. For if her joy at beholding him was unfeigned and avowed, she lost no time in letting him know how little excuse was thereby afforded him for personal vanity or self-congratulation. He had not been talking to her for two minutes before she ruthlessly cut short his hesitating commonplaces by inquiring :

“What became of you and—and your friend after that *Parsifal* evening?”

The short pause which preceded her reference to his friend was significant, as was also the smile (perceptible even in that uncertain light) with which she received his answer of :

"Oh, we tore our hair and went our respective ways; what else could we do? My way, as you see, has ended by landing me in Palace Gate; it is upon the cards, I suppose, that von Kahlenburg's may have the same goal, for he is no stranger in London."

"So he told me," observed Daphne, adding, after a moment of silence, "it is such a pity that mother can't bear him!"

"Does that matter?"

"Yes; because if, by any chance, he should come to London and should find out our address——"

"As he undoubtedly will."

"Do you think so? Well, then he will just as undoubtedly be told that we are not at home. And I shall be sorry for that, because I myself like him extremely. You also like him very much, don't you?"

"As much or as little as you please. The extent of my liking for him depends, I believe, entirely upon the extent of yours."

Daphne laughed. "Well," she said presently, "it would be good-natured of you."

"To tell him how extremely you like him?"

"That would be unnecessary, I hope; we got on so well together, he and I. But you might, if the occasion should arise, tell him that I am really sorry to seem so rude."

"You are going to seem rude, then?"

"I am afraid we must. Mother has taken him *en grippe*—for some reason which I can't guess. Can you?"

Jack shook his head—disappointing her a little, he fancied, by his inability to throw any light upon so strange a phenomenon. She put a few more questions to him. They were questions which anybody who had been unaccountably deprived of a pleasant acquaintance might have been expected to ask, and they did not in the least prove that she was breaking her heart for the vanished Otto; yet if she had been heart-broken, she would scarcely have proclaimed the circumstance, nor did it follow from her light manner that she was not a good deal more interested than she chose to appear. She took, at any rate, no sort of interest in an old friend, save such as attached to him in his capacity of a connecting link with

a new one. Jack soon satisfied himself of that chastening fact, formed his own conclusions and ceased to enlarge upon personal topics which had secured the sympathetic attention of her mother. Much Daphne cared whether he was succeeding or failing in his new part of a country gentleman!—much she cared whether he stood or not for the vacant Parliamentary division which he had been invited to contest! With regard to her own life and occupations she manifested a similar off-hand unconcern.

“Oh, there’s nothing to tell,” she said; “we jog placidly along. My one daily event just now is a fiddle lesson from a master who lives on the north side of the Park, and who gives himself such airs that his pupils have to go to him, since he won’t be at the pains of coming to them.”

Then she politely hoped that she might soon see Captain Clough again, and so resumed her march, leaving him with the impression that he had scarcely fulfilled the expectations which had evoked her cordial greeting. Of course there was not the ghost of a shadow of a hope!—there never had been, nor ever would be, any. It only remained to call a hansom

and drive back to St. James's Place, where Otto von Kahlenburg must by this time be impatiently awaiting the return of a friendly emissary.

For Otto von Kahlenburg was in London. It was, indeed, in some measure because he was in London that Jack Clough was now occupying the St. James's *pied-à-terre*, which was the symbol of sufficient means and occasional obligatory touch with the metropolis. His young friend had invoked his aid, rather as a matter of right than as a favour, and he had responded to the appeal—not very unwillingly, it is true. On reaching his rooms, he found, as he had anticipated, that Otto was already in possession, and the latter, throwing the end of a cigar into the fire, started up, with peremptory demands.

“Well? You have been there?—you have seen them? What did they say?”

“I have been there, and I have seen them,” the older man composedly replied. “They didn’t say much.”

“You told them that I was in England?”

“No; I thought it better not to tell them that. If I had done so, they would have said more, no doubt; but they said enough—Mrs. Hamilton did,

at least—to convince me that discretion was advisable. To speak plainly, my dear fellow, Mrs. Hamilton does not love you.”

“Do I ask Mrs. Hamilton to love me?”

“Probably not; yet I presume that you ask her, or will soon ask her, to receive you. And the fact is that, as at present advised, she will see you hanged first!”

“She said that!”

“Well, she gave me to understand as much.”

“And Daphne?”

“Oh, Miss Hamilton was apologetic in advance. Whether she guessed that you were already in this country or not I can’t say; but she evidently expected that you would put in an appearance before long, and she was anxious that you should know how much she regretted her mother’s determination to slam the door of their house in your face.”

Von Kahlenburg laughed good-humouredly. “My dear Clough, you will never allow her to treat me in that way.”

“How the deuce am I to prevent her? And if it comes to that, why the deuce should I?”

tions!' Well, perhaps you had better see Miss Hamilton; you will evidently manage to see her, whether it is better for you to do so or not. But take notice, please, that I reserve to myself complete future liberty of action."

CHAPTER VIII.

DETERMINATION.

IT is a great blessing to be young, and an even greater blessing to know your own mind. Few people, to be sure, when in possession of the former, realise the full importance of the latter; yet there belongs to early life an instinctive, unconscious contempt for obstacles which goes a long way towards the achievement of results. "He who will be Pope," says the proverb, "let him take it strongly into his head, and he shall be Pope." So Otto von Kahlenburg, having taken it strongly into his head that Daphne Hamilton and no other should be his wife, strode across the misty stretches of Hyde Park with a light-hearted determination which was in no wise dashed by the ascertained disapproval of persons who undoubtedly had it in their power to forbid the banns. His uncle? Oh, well, his uncle might, and probably would, make a fuss; but what then? A childless

widower, who has but one near relative in the world, has given hostages to fortune, and cannot, unless he be abnormally unfeeling, show much fight when respectfully defied by that one relative. As for Mrs. Hamilton, her mysterious prejudice must be overcome—would assuredly be overcome from the moment that she should be called upon to insure or destroy her daughter's happiness. What signified—what alone signified—was the question of whether her daughter's happiness was at stake or not. If Count Otto was confident upon that point, it may be pleaded for him that Daphne had, in those Bayreuth woods, given him fair excuse for confidence; if he was also intermittently diffident (as in truth he was) let him be credited with some measure of becoming modesty.

He had no need to ask the way to Palace Gate; for, foreigner though he was, he knew his London very well indeed, and had hosts of friends (and many friendly hosts) in a country which he frequently visited in pursuit of sport. Only, of course, he could not tell for certain at what precise hour Miss Hamilton might be expected to illuminate that somewhat dreary quarter of the town by her advent, and he

had, in prudence, allowed himself a wide margin of time, thus exciting the visible curiosity of a loitering policeman, whom he passed and repassed, while patrolling an exit from Kensington Gardens upon which it was necessary for him to keep an eye. The London police, unlike some of their foreign colleagues, are a simple, unsuspecting folk ; so that Count Otto ran little risk of being mistaken for a dynamiter, with designs upon the neighbouring Albert Memorial. The expectations of the gentleman in blue were doubtless verified when a lady, bearing a violin-case, became visible through the fog and falling darkness, and when the well-dressed saunterer sprang forward, hat in hand, to intercept her passage. Such encounters, it may be presumed, are not unfrequently witnessed by the guardians of law and order on that particular beat. Moreover, although this did not happen to be an assignation, it had all the appearance of one ; for the young lady exhibited no sign of surprise or perturbation.

“ How do you do ? ” she said, composedly. “ I was wondering whether you were in England or not. You have seen Captain Clough, perhaps ? ”

"Of course I am in England, and of course I have seen him," the young man answered. "Did he tell you that I was here, then?"

"No, he didn't tell me that; if he had, I shouldn't have been wondering, should I? But he seems to have told you that he met me near this spot yesterday. What else did he tell you, if it is allowable to ask?"

"He told me," replied Otto, after a momentary hesitation, "that there would be very little use in my calling at your mother's house."

"Ah, exactly! And that is why you have waylaid me?"

"It is a good reason, surely! You cannot have supposed that I should submit tamely to be refused sight of you!"

Daphne laughed. "Tame or fierce," she remarked, "you will have to submit, I am afraid, to the consequences of an antipathy which I regret quite as much as you can. But there it is, you see, and it can't be helped. I begged Captain Clough to take an opportunity of explaining and apologising to you."

No apology, she was assured, was requisite; but

something in the nature of an explanation would be very gratefully received. If it was not asking too much, might he implore her to turn back into Kensington Gardens and grant him five or ten minutes of conversation? He had travelled rather a long distance in quest of that boon, he pathetically added.

"I thought," returned Daphne demurely, "that you had travelled to this country in quest of something a little more exciting. Your name, at all events, has been mentioned among other distinguished guests who are expected to shoot Lord Dovedale's coverts towards the end of the month."

So she had taken the trouble to inform herself as to his engagements! That was an encouraging circumstance, despite the somewhat discouraging tone which she was pleased to assume. Her silent compliance with his request that she should retrace her steps might likewise be taken as an encouragement to the avowal which broke forth from him before they had stepped many yards, side by side, along the deserted Broad Walk.

"I did not come to England to shoot pheasants—if Lord Dovedale and others have been so kind as

to invite me, that is only because I gave them a hint, and because I had to make some excuse to my uncle—I came simply and solely to see you, to tell you what you know already, that I worship you, and that I cannot live without you!”

Miss Hamilton walked on, looking straight before her and answering nothing.

“I did not know that before,” was her eventual remark.

“Oh, I think you must have known! But even if you did not, you know now. Well?”

“Well—I am sorry. What more can I say? I won’t pretend not to have known—though we have never spoken about it, she and I—why my mother hurried away from Marienbad. There seemed to be a chance that this might happen. If you will promise me that it shall never happen again, perhaps we may continue to be friends and there will be no objection to our meeting occasionally.”

“Promise you that it shall never happen again! But—for what do you take me, then?”

The speaker’s accents of amazed consternation may have been a trifle exaggerated; he could not, and

did not, imagine that Daphne seriously contemplated dismissing him in that curt, unfeeling fashion. Nevertheless, he was chilled, and it scarcely comforted him to hear her reply with much tranquillity :

" You see, it is less a question of what you are or of what I take you to be than of what is possible and what is impossible ; and my mother——"

" Oh, Miss Hamilton !—Daphne !—can your mother make it impossible for you to love me ? "

" She can make it impossible for me to marry you. Oh, I know what you are going to say ; she is so good to me, and she has always spoilt me so much that I might, if I chose, induce her to consent to anything. It doesn't follow that I shall induce her to consent to a thing which she would hate."

" That is as much as to say that you do not love me ! "

" Have I ever given you any excuse for supposing that I did ? "

She really had ; and he might, at a trifling cost of self-respect, have quoted words of hers which had appeared to convey that impression. But perhaps, under the circumstances, it would be neither dignified

nor worth while to upbraid her. So he drew himself up to his full height, brought his heels together with a click, bowed stiffly from the waist, and said :

"Miss Hamilton, I see that I have made an unfortunate and ridiculous mistake. Pray, pardon me for having forced myself upon you, and let me assure you that the intrusion will not be repeated. I shall leave England to-morrow."

"Good-bye, then," returned Daphne pleasantly. "Won't it be rather rude to disappoint Lord Dove-dale and your other friends, though?"

"So rude that I shall never dare to show my face in this country again, which is exactly the result that I wish for."

The girl raised her eyes to the face which was about to be withdrawn permanently from their range. In the depths of those rare blue eyes some merriment was discernible, together with some compunction, while perhaps upon their surface (but it was impossible to swear to that in such an uncertain light) there was just a faint foreshadowing of tears to come.

"I don't think," said she deliberately, "that I ought to let you behave so badly."

"Nothing," returned Otto, still haughty and resentful, "is more easy than to prevent me, Miss Hamilton."

Nothing is more easy than to act in accordance with one's inmost desires, and few things are more difficult than to conceal those desires at a critical juncture. Daphne Hamilton, who was devoted to her mother, and who, after all, did not know as much about her wooer as she would have liked to know, by no means desired to be driven into a corner; but cornered she was, and nobody will be surprised to hear that she only extricated herself by what, for all practical purposes, amounted to unconditional surrender. Certain conditions, she imposed, it is true; but the force and value of these may be measured by the fact that when she and her companion quitted Kensington Gardens (by which time it was quite dark), she had promised that if it should not prove in her power to become his wife, she would at least never be anybody else's wife.

"Then there is no fear!" cried the exultant Otto,

at parting. "Your mother does not really dislike me; how could she?"

"I'm sure I don't know," answered Daphne, with a tremulous laugh.

"No; it is not me whom she dislikes, only Clough whom she would prefer. You did not guess that? Yet it was evident enough. Well, you absolutely decline Clough—who, for the rest, is not a candidate, bless him!—and all is said. If there are any little difficulties they will vanish. They shall and they must, now that I have won all I wanted to win!"

So fine a thing is it to be young and to know your own mind.

CHAPTER IX.

DISMISSAL.

"OH, what frights you give me!" Mrs. Hamilton reproachfully exclaimed, when her daughter, with shining eyes and glowing cheeks, entered the warm, flower-scented drawing-room. "I suppose I must not say anything about the impropriety of your being out so long after dark, for nothing is improper nowadays; but you might remember how impossible it is to help thinking of street accidents. For the last half hour or more I have seen omnibus horses trampling you to death!"

"I am so sorry!" murmured Daphne, whose air of conscious guilt seemed indeed somewhat disproportionate to her offence. "I should have been back long ago—what makes me behind time is that I—I met somebody."

Mrs. Hamilton, who had been informed of her

daughter's encounter on the previous evening, had an instant of wild, joyous hope. "Again!" she cried.

"Yes, but it was not Captain Clough this time. It was—well, I am afraid you won't be very glad to hear who it was."

Glad indeed!—there was to be no more gladness for poor Mrs. Hamilton yet awhile, and well she knew it. "Oh, Daphne," she feebly moaned, "don't, *don't* say that that odious young Austrian has turned up!"

"But he has. And, mother dear, he isn't odious; really he isn't!"

The girl dropped down on her knees beside her mother's chair and turned her lovely young face beseechingly towards the white, scared one of the older woman, which made no response. "Why are you so set against him?" she asked. "I don't want you to be, because——"

"Because?" echoed Mrs. Hamilton in a hollow voice.

"Only because he loves me, mother, and because I love him."

"Child, you break my heart when you say such

horrible things! How can you love him? One doesn't fall in love like that, from one moment to another. You must have been taken by surprise and lost your head—not your heart. Why you haven't wasted a thought upon him all these months!"

Daphne had bestowed many thoughts upon him, and owned that she had done so. That she had loved him for months past she could not positively affirm; it had seemed quite possible that she might never see him again, and it had likewise been upon the cards that he might not trouble himself to seek her out again. But now that he had sought her out and had demanded what he was entitled to demand, there could be no more room for present or future uncertainty. In a word, her destiny was decided, for better or for worse.

Mrs. Hamilton shook her head vehemently. "You don't know what you are saying! The thing can never be!—must never be! Believe me, dearest, it is out of the question!"

"But why?" Daphne asked, with incipient obstinacy in her intonation. "You give me no reason for its being out of the question, and I don't know of any."

"My dear child!—a foreigner and a Roman Catholic!"

"It isn't as if he were a Frenchman or a Russian; there is scarcely a possibility of our ever being at war with Austria. And as for the difference of creed, it is only a difference respecting certain dogmas, after all. I have always kept a tolerably open mind about such matters, and I think that perhaps—with an effort and a little instruction—I might manage to swallow the Pope."

Mrs. Hamilton could not repress a forlorn little laugh. "Heaven forgive me!" said she, "I believe I myself should be capable of swallowing the entire Sacred College with all its works if your happiness depended upon my opening my jaws to that extent; but this marriage would not be for your happiness. Daphne, dear, I don't want to give you orders (although I am your mother, remember, and you are not of age); I only implore you, for my sake and your own, not to insist. What you wish for, or think you wish for, is an absolute impossibility. Can you not take my word for that?"

"Not without an explanation," answered Daphne

firmly. "I suppose you know something about Count von Kahlenburg that I don't know. When you have told me what it is, I shall be able to judge whether our marriage is impossible or not."

"I would so very much rather not!" sighed Mrs. Hamilton; "it would be so infinitely better if you would just drop him!"

"Perhaps; but I can't do that, mother. He has my word, you see, and I can't take it back, giving him no reason or excuse."

"Ah, my poor child, that is exactly what you will have to do! Well—after dinner, then, you shall hear all. We must get through dinner first because of the servants; for we are both of us going to cry, I am afraid."

That process of getting through dinner without exciting menial curiosity is one which, as most people know by experience, is apt to impose a severe strain upon self-command; yet it is daily and more or less creditably accomplished by thousands. Mrs. Hamilton and her daughter behaved as well as the rest of us are wont to do and came out of the ordeal without shedding any premature tears. The former,

however, began to weep as soon as she felt at liberty to indulge in that solace.

"It is so horrid," she moaned, "to be obliged to dig up the dead and buried past like this! And I did so hope that I should never be obliged to do anything of the sort!"

Daphne sat down at her feet, took her hand and murmured, "Dear mother, you know I wouldn't distress you if I could help it!"

"Oh, you can't let me off; I quite understand that. The worst of it is that I can't let you off either. All I can do is to try and make a long story as short as possible. In order to bring everything clearly before you I should have to make it very long indeed; but there is no need at this time of day to do much more than state the bare, inexorable facts."

She paused for a moment and dried her eyes, while Daphne squeezed her fingers encouragingly.

"One would think," she resumed, with a short, nervous laugh, "that I was going to have a tooth out; whereas it is you—oh, poor you!—who are in for the wrench. *My* trouble is an old one—older than

you are—and it stopped being a trouble many years ago, when your father died. Well, I must not shiver on the brink any longer: listen, and I will tell you what I have never mentioned to any living being since the whole miserable business happened. I was a young married woman, almost a bride, when your poor father and I decided, for our misfortune, to spend a winter in Vienna. People were very civil and hospitable to us there, and although we were not at all well off in those days, we went out a great deal and spent what for us was a lot of money. Perhaps it was because we were spending more than we could afford that your father took to card-playing for high stakes with men far richer than himself: he used to say afterwards that that had been his motive and that it was imperatively necessary for him to win something. Every now and then he did win, but more often the luck went against him; so that by the time spring had set in and his associates had begun to talk about shutting up their town houses, he was in rather serious difficulties. In short, he was obliged to borrow; for he had no capital of his own then—only an allowance from his father,

who was a screwy old man, besides being sternly religious.

"I believe Herr von Pardowitz arranged a loan for him upon extortionate terms; but I know very little about that. I have never in my life been able to understand financial affairs, and I understood them even less then than I do now. On the other hand, I may say that I did from the first understand Herr von Pardowitz (as your poor father did not), and I should have thoroughly disliked him without the warnings against him which reached us from all sides. He was well known in Vienna as an unscrupulous character and a desperate, more than half-ruined gambler. Whether he was known to be a downright swindler or not I can't say; probably not, since people of good position continued to receive him. But a swindler he undoubtedly was, and your father, who for weeks and months had refused to listen to a word in disparagement of the wretch, caught him, one evening, in the act of cheating at cards in one of the principal clubs.

"There was a scene, of course, followed by a duel, which was stopped when your father had been

slightly wounded, although he was able and eager to go on. But that was not the worst of it. The worst of it was that he had brought a charge which he could not, unfortunately, substantiate and would not withdraw; added to which he refused to pay what he had not fairly lost. The newspapers said horrid things; the Embassy took the matter up; the end of the whole scandal was that we had to leave Vienna under a cloud—an entirely undeserved cloud.

“Old Mr. Hamilton, who was furious, sent a cheque to Herr von Pardowitz and a crushing letter to us, in which we were told that we must in future pursue our disreputable career on a reduced allowance. Of course we hadn't been in the least disreputable; but we had certainly been extravagant, as well as foolish, and I daresay the old man's indignation was not unnatural. We spent the summer economising in out-of-the-way Tyrolese villages, and I don't suppose we could have afforded to return home in the autumn if we had not been called back by the news of what turned out to be your grandfather's last illness.

“Oh, if that news had only come a day sooner or

a day later! People often talk about Providential escapes; but, dear me! if Providence is to be answerable for all the improbable things that take place, as well as for the probable ones that don't!—However, I don't and can't think that Providence had any hand in bringing us face to face with Herr von Pardowitz near the summit of the Stelvio Pass on the first stage of our homeward journey. Nothing more unfortunate could possibly have happened. We, coming from Tyrol, had walked some distance in advance of our crawling carriage; he, mounting from the Italian side, had, as we afterwards found, done the same; we met so suddenly at the turn of the road that I literally ran against him. Perhaps, if he had contented himself with taking off his hat and apologising, the peace might even then have been kept; but most likely he had not forgiven us, although he had robbed us and triumphed over us. Besides he was always inclined to be insolent in his manner to women. He said something silly and impertinent—I don't remember his exact words—and the next moment my husband, who was hot-tempered, and who would have been exasperated anyhow, I suppose,

by the sight of the man, had hit him full between the eyes.

"I recollect laughing when he disappeared backwards over the edge of the road, with his feet in the air—I didn't laugh again for many a long day! Now I have told you precisely what occurred and how it occurred. Nobody could call an accident of that kind manslaughter, much less murder; yet, as a matter of fact, it was your father who caused the wretched man's death by knocking him down on the brink of a sheer precipice, and, with the reasons that your father had for hating him, judges and juries might very well conclude that a deliberate crime had been committed.

"That was my first thought, after I realised the ghastly misfortune which had befallen us. Your father, strong and brave as he was, completely lost his nerve and presence of mind; I, who have never pretended to be anything but a coward, kept mine—how or why I have no idea—and saw that our only chance was to walk on as if nothing had happened. It was quite a quarter of an hour, and we were some distance beyond the summit of the pass, before we

met Herr von Pardowitz's carriage; our own overtook us almost at the same moment, and not many hours later we were flying across Europe as fast as an express train could take us. Some time afterwards we learned, through a newspaper paragraph, that the lifeless body of our enemy had been discovered at the bottom of a ravine. Apparently there had been no suspicion or suggestion of foul play; it was taken for granted that the unfortunate man had missed his way and his footing.

"Well, I can't say that personally I felt very much remorse. I might have felt more, perhaps, if your father had not taken the thing so terribly and unreasonably to heart. He was never the same man again; he never recovered his spirits, and his health, which had been so splendid up to that time, grew gradually worse and worse until he died. If the dead know what is taking place in this world after their removal from it—but I hope and trust they don't—what a bitter, ironical punishment must have been inflicted upon him when his daughter threw herself into the arms of his victim's son!"

Daphne, who had not once interrupted her mother's

narrative, and who had falsified the latter's prediction by shedding no tears, looked up now.

"Is it certain that Otto is the victim's son?" she asked.

"There cannot be the shadow of a doubt about it; you heard what he said that evening at Bayreuth. Besides, he is the living image of his father. I saw the likeness when we first met him at Dresden, and I had a presentiment that he would bring us trouble; though his name seemed to prove that he could not be really what I should otherwise have felt almost sure that he was. I might have told you—perhaps I ought to have told you—all this before; but I clung to the hope that there would be no need for that."

"The miserable part of it," said Daphne slowly, after a pause, "is that I can't tell him."

"You may, if you choose, dear; nobody can be made to suffer now for a fatality which was nobody's fault even at the time of its occurrence."

"Only you would rather that I didn't, I suppose?"

Mrs. Hamilton acknowledged that she would prefer a less painful solution of their joint dilemma. Every imaginable solution was bound to be painful; but

the simplest, the least explanatory, the most unanswerable would be the best, she thought. "I am sorry to say that, upon reflection, I find I cannot possibly marry you"—what wooer, however ardent or persistent, can show much fight in the face of so bald and uncompromising a statement as that? Secretly, the poor woman was rejoiced at, and grateful for, her daughter's tractability. She had not felt as convinced as she could have wished to feel that Daphne would recognise how monstrous a thing an alliance with Herr von Pardowitz's son would be.

Daphne fully recognised that. She behaved very well—crying a little indeed, as was but natural, yet admitting that there was nothing for it but to break finally with the man whom she loved. Only she could not write or telegraph to him in the sense suggested, for the simple reason that she was unacquainted with his address.

"He will call to-morrow morning," she said. "Then you must see him for me, mother, and tell him——"

"Oh, dear! oh, dear! what am I to tell him?" groaned Mrs. Hamilton.

"Anything you like, except the truth—which I know it would hurt you too much to tell. It doesn't really matter what you say, so long as he is made to understand quite decisively that all is over."

As if it would be easy to make him understand anything without recourse to the most reckless mendacity!—or even with it! Nevertheless, Mrs. Hamilton accepted the mission imposed upon her, inwardly owning that she was fortunate to be entrusted with the same. It was, of course, most desirable that the lovers should not meet again, and indeed the mere fact of Daphne's refusal to see young von Kahlenburg ought to go a long way towards discouraging him. Before morning, no doubt, some method of politely and considerately completing his discomfiture would suggest itself to a perplexed brain.

Many plausible methods did indeed suggest themselves to Mrs. Hamilton during the night watches, but nobody will be surprised to hear that they, one and all, failed ignominiously when the time came for testing what they might be worth. Otto von Kah-

lenburg, who was admitted at a really inadmissible hour the next day, simply laughed the assurances of the lady by whom he was received, to scorn. For opposition on that lady's part he had been prepared, he said, and very sorry he was that she should deem it her duty to oppose him; but he was not without hope that he might win the approval which had hitherto been unhappily withheld from him. In any case, why waste time by putting forward representations to which no man in his senses could give a moment's credence? It proved, in short, indispensable to make him acquainted with the facts of the situation—facts, which, he was forced sorrowfully to acknowledge, could neither be denied nor set aside. He did not at once make that acknowledgment; he pointed out that, when all was said, his father had not really been murdered by the late Mr. Hamilton, and he put it to Mr. Hamilton's widow whether a secret which was known to only three living persons might not very well remain a secret. But he was silenced by her rejoinder that not one of those persons (whom alone it concerned) would ever be able to forget it, and that, however lightly he might esteem

the memory of the dead, she and her daughter were otherwise constituted.

"You are mistaken," she added, "if you think I dislike you personally. Your resemblance to your father may have prejudiced me against you in the first instance—I confess that it did—and of course I should wish Daphne, if I could choose, to marry a man of her own nation and religion——"

"Such as our friend Clough, for example?"

"Oh, yes; I should have been very glad and thankful to bestow her upon Captain Clough. But all that is comparatively unimportant; I can truly say that her happiness has always been the first consideration with me. Perhaps your idea is that I might have insured her happiness, as well as yours, by simply holding my tongue? Well, I have once or twice thought so; but, rightly or wrongly, I felt that I could not allow her to become your wife in ignorance of the truth. One can never be sure, you see, that truth will not come out some day; and where would her happiness have been if she had chanced to discover too late that her father had killed yours?"

The young man hesitated to reply that the injustice of visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children is patent. That, to be sure, is what most of us instinctively feel; but age-long traditions die hard. So he only said interrogatively, "She agrees with you about the matter, then?"

"Oh, absolutely. She would tell you so, I know, if she could see you; but she thought, as I did, that it would be better for her not to see you."

"Ah, that was because you and she thought it would be better to keep me in the dark. But now that I have been enlightened—and indeed, my dear lady, I am grateful to you for enlightening me—may I not be permitted to bid her adieu? That is not, surely, a great deal to ask? I am reasonable, I shall not try to conquer her scruples, and, from what you tell me, I should gain nothing by it if I did. Would any harm be done to anybody by your granting me this last request?"

Under all the circumstances, probably none. Mrs. Hamilton, in spite of—or perhaps in consequence of—some conscious resentment against her petitioner for being what he was, made the desired concession.

She would convey his wish to her daughter, she said ; he would understand, of course, that her daughter must decide whether it should be complied with or not. Thereupon she left the room, which Daphne, about five minutes later, entered alone.

Otto von Kahlenburg belonged to a nation somewhat punctilious, somewhat old-world and rigid as regards its manners and notions. In Austria it is altogether incorrect to embrace a lady to whom you are not affianced, if indeed it be, strictly speaking, permissible to do so even when you are. But—either because he was not in Austria or because the ways of one's epoch are more or less necessarily one's own ways—he boldly threw etiquette to the winds, and Daphne's head was resting on his shoulder as he whispered into her ear the query—the tentatively perfidious query—“*Must* it be good-bye?”

She replied without any hesitation that it must. “Oh, not for always ; I don't see why we shouldn't meet again some day and be friends again. But you know, after hearing poor mother's story, what can never be again.”

“Well, that is her view, and if, as she says, it is

yours also, I can only submit. Will you be horrified if I confess that it wouldn't have been mine? I cannot quite admit that my father's death through a pure accident, which your father, I am sure, would have been the first to deplore, ought to create a vendetta between our families. My father was my father; it is not for me to breathe a word against his memory, although, by my uncle's account, he was not in all respects an admirable character. It seems, however, that he always bore the name of being good-natured. Can you suppose that he would have wished to ruin my life, and perhaps yours as well, for the sake of revenging himself upon careless road-makers, who should have built a parapet where there was none?"

Daphne reminded her questioner that this interview was only taking place in virtue of an understanding that the opportunities afforded by it were not to be abused. "There is no use in speculating upon what the wishes of the dead might be, if they could come back to life. Nothing can change the fact that my father killed yours, and nothing can ever change my mother's conviction that that

miserable fact opens an impassable gulf between you and me."

"Nothing?"

"Nothing, I am afraid, short of your father's return to life. It is quite certain, I suppose, that he was killed?"

"Oh, yes," answered the young man, with an unmirthful laugh, "he was quite certainly killed. But is that—I am only asking you what your own feeling is, apart from Mrs. Hamilton's convictions—is that a reason for condemning me to something worse than death?"

It will be seen that Mrs. Hamilton's concession had been the reverse of prudent. Daphne might protest that that was an absurdly exaggerated way of putting things, and might predict, with a fine assumption of cheerfulness, that both she and the man whom she loved would get over their present sorrow; but she had in the end to admit—how could she help it?—that she did not herself share her mother's conception of duty to the departed. Furthermore, she owned, in response to vows which would not be silenced, that she did not believe in the possibility

of her ever marrying anybody, save the one person whom it was manifestly impossible for her to marry.

Whether the grief of parting (for as to the necessity of a rupture she was as firm as a rock) was softened for her by half an hour of tender passages may be doubtful; but Otto, at all events, left the house in a mood less despondent than the situation warranted. If ever a man's case was hopeless, his was; yet so young, so self-reliant and so constitutionally sanguine was he, that he could not bring himself to abandon all hope, now that he was assured of Daphne's unalterable love. Time works all manner of wonders; Mrs. Hamilton might die or, better still, might change her mind. Yes! therein—in the persuasion of Mrs. Hamilton, by hook or crook, to change her mind—lay the excuse for hope and the incentive to future action. So he marched eastwards, revolving the most fantastic schemes in an imaginative mind.

CHAPTER X.

CONSULTATION.

IT was no doubt a sound instinct which led Otto, after quitting Palace Gate, to shape his course for St. James's Place. Clough, he reflected, was a man who, if rather deficient in imagination and resource, might always be relied upon to take a sober, practical view of no matter what crisis, and he felt that his own exuberant fancy (which was urging wild imprudences upon him) would be none the worse for a calming dose of common sense. Clough, however, was not at home; nor, according to the ex-soldier servant who opened the door, would he be found at his club that day. The Captain, it appeared, had gone out to luncheon with a lady.

Nothing could have been less in accordance with the said Captain's habits; for he was no great frequenter of ladies' society, while, in common with

most men who are no longer in their first youth, he detested every form of daylight hospitality. Still, there were a few friends, such as this old Mrs. Bingham, with whom he occasionally consented to lunch, upon the understanding that he was to be their sole guest, and his hostess, when he was shown into her presence, made haste to apologise for a breach of contract which, she assured him, was quite involuntary on her part.

"I know you hate being asked to meet people; but what was I to do when these women invited themselves by telegram? A Mrs. Perkins and her daughters, who scraped acquaintance with me in Switzerland some weeks ago and whom I shall never be able to shake off again without employing a brutality which isn't in my character."

Jack groaned. "A fat Mrs. Perkins, with two marriageable daughters?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, she is fat and vulgar—not unamiable, though. As for her daughters, they would hardly set their caps at so forbidding a person as you, I should think. Besides, I believe one of them is already engaged."

"That," remarked Jack gloomily, "is pretty certain to be Rosie. Minnie's cap, you may depend upon it, remains unappropriated, and unless I greatly misjudge her, she is prepared to set it at any lone man."

Minnie herself soon arrived upon the scene to vindicate her reputation. Amid the whoops of delighted recognition with which her mother and her sister greeted the faithless one, she contrived to murmur reproachfully in his ear, "Oh, Captain Clough, how *could* you be so shabby as to slink away from Marienbad like that, after all your promises!"

Good Heavens! what promises? Like the honest and literal man that he was, he protested loudly, in response to the upbraidings of the whole family, that he had never made any. But Mrs. Perkins shook a fat forefinger and a flowery bonnet at him.

"Ah, you treated us shamefully—you really did! Well, well! I suppose we must forgive you."

"You needn't unless you like; I don't make a point of it," thought Jack, though he was too polite to say so.

"And now," continued the stout lady, settling herself comfortably in an armchair, "now that we *have*,

happily, met once more—so curious and so nice that you should be a friend of dear Mrs. Bingham's!—we must exchange news. Our chief piece of news," she added, pointing to the rosy Rosie, "you may very likely have heard."

Rosie, it seemed, had triumphantly captured her Marienbad hobbledehoy—a young man of independent means, her mother announced, with candid glee—and wisely proposed to lead him to the altar in as brief a space of time as might be. Jack congratulated the bride-elect, listened patiently to further domestic communications of which the relevance was not very conspicuous, and wondered how long it would be before he was asked for Mrs. Hamilton's address. He did not have to wait many more minutes.

"Dear Mrs. Hamilton! I *must* go and see her. Palace Gate, did you say? I should have gone before this, but we have only been a few days in London, and, as you may imagine, so busy with dressmakers, and all the rest of it! You see, we let our own house, quite intending to spend another winter abroad; so we have had to take rooms in

Cork Street—will you remember 114, Cork Street? Perhaps you had better write it down. Yes, I will really make time to call on dear Mrs. Hamilton to-morrow or next day. Oh, and who *do* you think whizzed past us in a hansom this morning? Count von Kahlenburg! I am rather short-sighted myself, but the girls were quite sure it was he, and we are devoured with curiosity, all of us! Did you know he was in England? But naturally you must have known. And is there anything to be told about him?—anything interesting about him and dear Daphne?"

An hour later Mrs. Bingham followed her swiftly-departing male guest out of the room to apologise anew.

"My poor, dear man, what a time you have been having of it! If I could have foreseen that your tenderest feelings were going to be so trampled upon, I would have telegraphed to that wretched woman that I was ill, or dead, or something! But she didn't get much information out of you, did she?" the old lady concluded, with a little laugh.

Mrs. Bingham, who was to some extent in Jack

Clough's confidence, was aware (although he had never told her as much) that he loved Daphne Hamilton. She was, therefore, in a position to realise how much, during luncheon, he must have enjoyed the conversation of the Perkins family, which had related almost exclusively to Daphne's alleged inclination for her Austrian admirer.

"I had no information to give her," answered Jack, "and she didn't lacerate my feelings, thanks. I am a little sorry for myself, I confess, inasmuch as I shall have to call upon her, I suppose, and I am still more sorry for the Hamiltons, upon whom she will assuredly call; but it's all in the day's work."

He thought to himself, as he walked away, that Mrs. Perkins, despite her insatiable curiosity, could scarcely be as eager for information as he was; yet he dreaded the announcement which most likely was in store for him, and when, on reaching home, he found Otto von Kahlenburg awaiting his return, his heart sank. That, however, did not prevent him from asking cheerfully: "Well, is it all right?"

"My dear friend," answered the young man throwing up his arms, "you would never guess how astonish-

ingly all wrong it is! *Recht fatal!*—as we say in our country. But I am not defeated; I will not accept defeat. Only I wish to have your opinion about it all.”

“Oh, you know my opinion in advance. My opinion is that, if you have been victorious with the daughter—as your words and your face imply—it is not the mother who will inflict defeat upon you. I doubt whether she will even try very much.”

“Wait a moment. Yes, Heaven be praised! I was victorious with my adored Daphne. I met her last night on her way home and—but it would not interest you to hear, and perhaps I have hardly the right to tell you, what she said. Whether I have the right to repeat to you what her mother has been saying to me this morning I am not altogether sure. She did not bind me to secrecy; yet, as you will see, it is imperative that her secret should be kept. You are to be trusted, eh?”

“I believe I generally pass for being trustworthy,” answered Jack. “At the same time I don’t wish to pry into matters which don’t concern me.”

He was in truth a little piqued at having been

kept in ignorance by Mrs. Hamilton of matters which evidently concerned Daphne, and which had been revealed to a more recent and less intimate acquaintance.

"It is true," answered Otto, "that this unhappy history does not directly concern you; still, you are Mrs. Hamilton's friend and my friend; we can depend upon your discretion. Moreover, if she can dispense with your advice, I cannot. Sit down, and I will lay the case before you in a dozen words."

He employed a rather larger number of words than that; yet his narrative was concise and clear—so clear, indeed, that when he had made an end of speaking his mentor had but cold comfort to offer him.

"I am afraid there is nothing to be done. I am grieved for you and—and the poor girl; but Mrs. Hamilton's veto seems to be unanswerable—inexpugnable!"

"Ah! but is it? The whole question, you see, turns upon that. I myself don't feel, nor does Daphne—nor, I am sure, would you, if you were in our place—that we ought to be separated by a mere

accident, which never has been, and never will be, made public."

"Oh, if you want me to talk Mrs. Hamilton over, I will try my hand; but I warn you that I am not confident of success. In any case, a good deal of time and diplomacy would be required. Then there is your uncle to be considered."

"My dear Clough, he cannot be considered! Naturally, he must be kept in the dark. Although, as far as that goes, I really do not think that he is very sensitive upon the subject of my father's memory. I don't mind telling you what I have heard from him, and what I did not care to mention to Mrs. Hamilton—that my father's removal was a great relief to the family. There were scandals, I believe, which could not have been hushed up if he had lived."

"All the same, your uncle may object to your marrying the daughter of his brother's—what shall we call him?—executioner? The more so if he should happen to be in want of a good, solid objection to Miss Hamilton."

"That is precisely why he must be kept in the dark."

"But if Mrs. Hamilton insists upon his being admitted into the light?"

The young man shrugged his shoulders. "Why complicate our difficulties by bothering about my uncle now?" he asked. "Let us at least leave him aside for the present. The first thing, and by far the most important thing, is to conciliate Mrs. Hamilton. You think, perhaps, that Daphne is able to undertake that? Well, she may be able, but she is not willing; she will not attempt it. I can assure you that she will not—and I ought to know."

Jack thrust his hands into his pockets and stared up at the ceiling. Why should he, of all people in the world, undertake what Daphne was unwilling to attempt? The answer, to be sure, was as obvious as it was absurd; he was ready to attempt anything for her sake, even though it should be to his own hindrance. But really there was so very little likelihood of his overcoming Mrs. Hamilton's quite proper scruples!—less likelihood even than he could explain, although he repeated emphatically that he did not anticipate success.

"Well, if you fail," said Otto, "I must fall back

upon some other plan ; I have thought of several. But the simplest and best, I believe, is for you to influence her in the right direction. You will write, of course, and keep me informed ; for, as my presence in London would be useless at present, I am going down to the country to shoot."

"That, at any rate, is a good and simple plan. I should rather like to adopt it myself, but I suppose my duty is to stay where I am and achieve impossibilities for the sake of people from whom I shall get no thanks."

"You shall be thanked if you achieve them," his young friend generously promised.

CHAPTER XI.

ALTRUISM.

CAPTAIN CLOUGH awoke, the next morning, with that vague impression, familiar to all sons of Adam, that something disagreeable had happened, or was about to happen. Then he remembered what it was, and the thing looked as much more disagreeable than it had done on the previous night as things invariably look in the grey, early hours. It looked supremely ridiculous into the bargain. What, indeed, can be more ridiculous than astutely scheming on a rival's behalf?—unless it be disclaiming sentiments which you are known to entertain. And to that absurd course of action he was practically committed. Moreover, he must, as a preliminary measure, avow that he was acquainted with facts of which he was supposed to be, and perhaps ought to be, in ignorance. It

seemed highly probable that his first step would earn for him a not unmerited snub.

His first step, however, was simplified for him by the discovery amongst his letters of an appeal from Mrs. Hamilton, who described herself as in great trouble and very unwell, and who wished "*most particularly*" to see him for purposes of consultation. That appeared to imply that she contemplated telling him all about it; in which case he might open operations by lending a sympathetic ear and holding his tongue.

Later in the day she did tell him all about it—having ingenuously explained, as a reason for so doing, that he would have been sure to suspect something in the long run and might quite possibly have suspected that matters were even worse than they were. He found her extended upon a sofa by the fireside, and her pale, harassed face gave support to the statement with which she greeted him, that she had not closed an eye all the night through.

"What distresses and alarms me most," she wound up her narrative (which Jack judged it best not to interrupt and to receive as news) by saying, "is that

"I wonder in what way my possessing that negative form of beauty can help you!"

"Jack," said Mrs. Hamilton imploringly, "is this a time for beating about the bush? We are old friends, and—we understand one another, don't we?"

"Well, since you ask me, I must confess that I doubt it. Of course I understand you—that isn't difficult—but have I ever given you to understand that I am the accommodating creature you take me for? Just consider it for one moment from my point of view, if you can. Without being proud, and with every wish to oblige, one still retains some vestiges of self-respect."

"There is such a thing as false pride, and young people's fancies are so evanescent!" Mrs. Hamilton feebly pleaded.

"Everything is evanescent, including our well-intentioned selves, and nothing matters half as much as we are prone to imagine. I will pocket my pride and try, then, if you like; but I make no promises and bind myself by no sort of engagements. Obviously I can't, when all depends upon somebody else."

"I cannot," answered Mrs. Hamilton, with much gravity, "help feeling that it is the one chance. And I think you ought to profit by it—for your own sake as well as for ours."

Jack burst out laughing. His manners occasionally left a little to be desired, and it is certainly rude to be convulsed with merriment when nothing in the shape of a joke has been perpetrated.

"But you do care for her, you know," Mrs. Hamilton remonstrated.

"Oh, yes, I know it—and you know it—and so, possibly, does she. I haven't drawn a very thick veil over my sentiments. What requires no demonstration is that that she doesn't, at present, care one solitary brass farthing for me. Nevertheless, I am, as I say, prepared to try. Can you ask more?"

It may be that Mrs. Hamilton was about to ask more; for what woman ever omits to do that, after gaining an initial point? But she was arrested, open-mouthed, by the announcement of a visitor—a visitor who had apparently been admitted, notwithstanding her express instructions to the effect that she would be at home only to Captain Clough. It is by such

means that servants pay off old scores with impunity and avenge the ungenerous refusal of an evening out.

Mrs. Perkins waddled into the room, puffing, panting, overflowing with misplaced geniality. "Dearest Mrs. Hamilton, what a pleasure it is to see you again! We have only just returned from abroad, and have been quite run off our legs, or I should have called before now; but, as I told Captain Clough, whom I met yesterday—oh, here he is in person to bear me witness! How do you do, dear Captain Clough? Well, I told him that I should make a point of looking you up this afternoon, and here I am, you see. Dear Daphne quite well, I hope? You have heard of my Rosie's engagement, I daresay; it has been announced in all the papers, they tell me. The way those newspaper reporters pick up things before one has even had time to inform one's own friends! But I was going, at the very first spare moment, to write to *you*!"

Jack, while making good his retreat, caught fragments of Mrs. Hamilton's perfunctory, but civil, felicitations. The fine art of being uncivilly civil counts but few adepts in England, and Mrs. Hamil-

ton was not one of them. Like the rest of us, she knew how to be rude; but, unlike the majority of us, she shrank from putting that capability into practice, save under circumstances of the utmost provocation. So Mrs. Perkins, comfortably assured of being welcome, made herself at home, and begged for a cup of tea.

Jack was struggling into his overcoat, which he had left in the hall, when the door of a small adjoining room was opened and one of the most beautifully shaped heads that have ever adorned human shoulders appeared through the aperture.

"Are you in a hurry?" Daphne asked, "or can you spare me five minutes?"

As he would gladly have devoted every remaining minute of his life to her service, it was scarcely necessary for him to answer. However, he made the reply which she had doubtless anticipated, and she at once announced her reason for having intercepted him.

"I want to know," she began, "what mother has been saying to you."

Jack smiled. "'You don't want much, do you,

mum?" he returned, "as the omnibus conductor remarked to the old lady who told him she wanted the Bank of England."

"But would you be guilty of a great breach of confidence if you were to oblige me?"

"Well, yes; I am afraid I should. There can't be much harm though, in my revealing that your mother is desperately eager for you to be consoled."

"Ah, then you have heard everything! As for my being consoled—what do you think?"

"I should know better what to think if I knew what you thought about it all. There are consolations, of course, supposing you could be induced to regard them as such. Otto von Kahlenburg is a nice young fellow; but there are hundreds and thousands of other nice young fellows. His uncle would almost certainly have raised difficulties. Mixed marriages are always best avoided. It will be all the same ten years hence—or even sooner, perhaps. These are consolatory reflections; I offer them to you for what they are worth."

"Captain Clough, have you ever in your life been in love?"

"Oh, yes; I am more than thirty years of age."

"Then you must know that reflections of that sort would not be in the least consoling, even if they were true—which some of them are not. I don't want to make a fuss; I am determined not to make a fuss," the girl went on, with a momentary break in her voice; "but I do want mother to realise—and I want you, if you will be so kind, to help me in this—that there is absolutely only one person in the world whom I could ever marry. In other words, there is absolutely nobody in the world whom I can ever marry."

Jack sighed. "Ah! is it so bad as that?"

"It is as bad as that; but it might be worse. I might be unreasonable, and I am not unreasonable. I might think, and indeed I do think, that mother's scruples are overstrained; but I wouldn't for the world make her miserable by telling her so, and I recognise that my engagement is as dead as if I myself were dead. Only I dread having substitutes thrust upon me, as if I were a child with a broken doll! If you can dissuade mother from looking about

for substitutes, you will do both me and her a real service."

"Very well," answered her obedient and humble servant, sighing once more. "All the same, it is possible, you know, to fall in love more than once in the course of a lifetime."

"Your saying that," observed Daphne, with a compassionate smile, "proves quite conclusively that you yourself have never been in love once."

"So that verdict is one's reward!" thought Jack to himself, as he departed from the house. "Well, I know how I stand now, at all events. I don't quite know what becomes of my promise to Mrs. Hamilton, though; I certainly didn't make much effort to keep it. The next thing, I suppose, will be that I shall find myself plotting against her, with Otto von Kahlenburg as my confederate. And for what object, good Heavens! To throw the girl whom I worship into the arms of a man whom it is really hardly decent for her to marry, and who, apart from all other considerations, would probably be forbidden by his family to marry her. Isn't this pushing altruism rather beyond excusable limits? And yet—I can't

bear to see her keeping up such a brave show, with her eyes swimming in tears the whole time! - Perhaps she is right, and I am not, properly speaking, in love. Perhaps I couldn't be so confoundedly unselfish if I were."

CHAPTER XII.

RESURRECTION.

"If this is what you call trying," Mrs Hamilton remarked, in aggrieved accents, "I should rather like to know what you would call throwing up the sponge."

Jack Clough, who had been lunching in Palace Gate, and who had just allowed Daphne to set forth for her violin lesson without offering to escort her, shrugged his shoulders patiently. "There are several ways," he remarked, "of courting success or failure. A very good way of making a failure certain is to force your company upon the person whom you wish to propitiate."

"Well, nobody can accuse you, I am sure, of having erred in that direction. You come here day after day; you talk to Daphne about nothing but music—the one subject which you ought to avoid,

considering how ignorant you are of it!—you look rather pleased than otherwise when she puts forward some excuse for leaving us. Really one would think that your one aim was to convince her how innocent you are of any serious intentions!”

“Doesn’t that show what an astute diplomatist I am? Would you prefer me to cast myself incontinently at her feet and be kicked for my pains? It is just ten days, I believe, since she accepted Otto von Kahlenburg, and nine since she was compelled by the force of destiny to renounce him. Do you really think that any girl’s affections can be transferred from one man to another in nine days?”

“Oh, if you choose to put it like that!”

“I choose to put things as they are,” answered Jack, who, being an honest man and no diplomatist, would indeed have chosen to do so, had liberty of choice been his. But he perceived that, for the present, he could render Daphne no better service than to foster her mother’s illusions.

“The least and the most that we can do,” he resumed, “is to give her time. She is behaving admirably; she has taken up the thread of her life

again as if nothing had occurred to break it; she doesn't cry and she doesn't sigh; if you are not satisfied with her conduct, you must be hard to please. But if you imagine that it is possible for her to be happy or indifferent already, you must be—well, I won't be so rude as to say what you must be. To me it is very evident that what she most requires just now is to be let alone; and that, amongst other reasons, is why I am going to run down home for a week or more."

There were, naturally, other reasons which impelled him to adopt that course. For Daphne's sake, he did not wish to announce forthwith that he resigned all pretensions to her hand; for Mrs. Hamilton's sake, he deemed it best to encourage provisionally hopes which could never be fulfilled; for his own sake, he longed to escape from daily encounters which were becoming almost too much for his self-control. So, after enunciating the above specious pretext, he made haste to retire.

Mrs. Hamilton, though not best pleased with him, was fain to recognise that he made out a tolerably plausible case for himself. It was perhaps as well

—since he saw fit to be so unimpassioned—that he should withdraw for a while; only that did not seem like a particularly hopeful method of effacing Otto von Kahlenburg from Daphne's memory. At certain moments she almost preferred Otto to Jack, almost wished that Otto was not so entirely out of the question. A lover is, after all, such a very much more interesting and sympathetic being than a philosopher!

A few days after Captain Clough had temporarily turned his back upon London Mrs. Hamilton noticed, amongst the letters brought to her with her matutinal cup of tea, an envelope addressed in a stiff, foreign handwriting which she did not recognise. After the manner of her sex, she examined it closely and curiously before opening it, saying to herself at last, "This is from that unfortunate young man. Well, if he must needs write, it is creditable of him to write to me, and not to Daphne."

But she was mistaken. Her correspondent did not, as she had expected, sign himself Otto von Kahlenburg; nor, for that matter, was any signature at all appended to the following lines, which she read

three times over with increasing wonder and bewilderment :

"If you care to hear something which may be of interest to you in connection with a bygone and a forgotten accident on the Stelvio Pass, you will call at 95, Old Burlington Street any afternoon between the hours of four and five, and ask for Herr Weiss. Considerations which can be confidentially explained to you prevent Herr Weiss from doing himself the honour to call at your residence."

Not unnaturally, Mrs. Hamilton's first impression was that this mysterious summons must emanate, directly or indirectly, from Otto. To nobody else, save to Jack Clough, had she mentioned the Stelvio Pass since the days of her distant youth, nor could the unhappy event with which it was associated in her memory affect any other living man for good or for ill. But, however that might be, her response was assured. Old Burlington Street is within a stone's throw of Cork Street, where she had an obligatory call to pay, and after leaving cards, that same afternoon, for Mrs. Perkins (who, luckily, was not at home), she proceeded on foot to the respectable-look-

ing lodging-house indicated by her anonymous applicant. On asking for Herr Weiss she was at once admitted and shown into a small sitting-room on the ground floor. The German gentleman was in his bedroom, said the young woman who poked the fire and held out a grimy hand for Mrs. Hamilton's card, but he had mentioned that he was expecting a lady, and he should be told that the lady had come.

Presently Herr Weiss entered—a tall, elderly, soldierly man, with white hair and a white, up-turned moustache. He drew his feet together, bowed from the waist and smiled, without speaking. Something in his gait, his manner, above all, in his vaguely impertinent smile, caused the lady who faced him to draw in her breath sharply, and it was to her as though half her lifetime had been suddenly obliterated when at length he said, in suave, once familiar accents, "I perceive, dear madam, that you do not recognise me."

"But I do!" she gasped. "That is, I should, if it were not quite, *quite* impossible for you to be—Herr von Pardowitz!"

He threw up his hands deprecatingly. He had always had white, pretty, well-shaped hands, and the years which had blanched his hair had worked no visible alteration in these, she noticed. Nor—as was evidenced by his next words—had he lost his old offensive trick of paying exaggerated compliments.

“Ah, but it is not impossible—oh, not at all impossible!—for you to be still the charming and beautiful Mrs. Hamilton. You are as fresh as a rose, dear madam! As for me, I am, it is needless to say, a deplorable old wreck; yet I remain—to you, though not to the world at large—the man whose name you are so obliging as to recall.”

“That man,” faltered Mrs. Hamilton, “was killed in my sight more than twenty years ago.”

“You mean,” corrected the other, “that he was pushed headlong over the edge of a precipice in your sight. That he was not killed, your present sight, which, I am sure, is as good as ever it was, must convince you. Will you not do me the honour to take a chair? My own sight, I regret to say, has suffered, like the rest of my faculties, from the ravages

of time, and I cannot endure gas light. But perhaps these candles" (he lighted a pair on the mantelpiece as he spoke) "may suffice for purposes of identification."

They sufficed, or rather (for indeed their feeble spark scarcely lessened the deepening gloom) the man's voice and demeanour sufficed, to prove that he was what he claimed to be.

"You used not to speak English so fluently," was Mrs. Hamilton's only attempt at criticism or incredulity.

"Did I not? That may well be; for I have lived a great deal amongst English people during all these years of exile."

"But what exile? Why exile?" she comprehensively asked.

"My dear lady," he answered, smiling, "you were no friend of mine in days gone by, and it was probably no secret to you that I had many enemies besides yourself."

"You deserved to have enemies."

"I will not contradict you. And, to speak frankly, they would have it in their power to inflict some

disagreeable legal penalties upon me if your husband had not knocked me into space at an appropriate moment. Now, although concussion of the brain is not the same thing as a fractured skull, it may, by judicious disbursements, and the connivance of relatives who desire nothing more ardently than one's demise, be made to answer very much the same purpose. Do you understand?"

"I begin to understand. Your relations know that you are still alive, then? And you would still be liable to imprisonment or some other form of punishment if the fact of your being still alive were made public?"

"The answer to the second question is yes; I am compelled, for reasons with which I need not weary you, but which you can guess, I daresay, to preserve a strict incognito. Consequently, I doubted the prudence of calling at your house. With regard to the first question, I may say that I am as dead as my relatives can wish me to be. They certainly do not know what has become of me, and they certainly hope that I am no more. I, on my side, should be extremely sorry to give them any further trouble.

My wife has been for many years dead ; my son—so I have heard—has been adopted by my brother, and has presumably not been informed that he had a deplorable miscreant for a father ; what should I gain by revealing myself to them ? Blackmail, as you call it in this country ? Ah, yes!—blackmail. But suppose, in spite of my having once forged another man's name (I do not spare myself, you see), I should retain a conscience ? Having never associated with criminals, you are doubtless not aware that quite a large number of them allow themselves that luxury ; yet so it is. I must request you, therefore, to give me your word of honour that, in the very unlikely event of your coming across a member of my family, you will not betray me."

Mrs. Hamilton did not give her word of honour ; but she was upon the point of stating that she had recently come across a very near relative of her interlocutor's. However, before she could do so, he resumed :

"It is, in short, precisely because I have a conscience that you are here this afternoon. I do not, you will admit, owe much reparation to your late

He raised his eyebrows. "So!—my son is in England? No; I was not aware of the circumstance, and I should not recognise my son if I were to meet him. I have, in fact, no son; the young man of whom you speak is the nephew of his uncle, and does not bear the name which was once mine. How, I wonder, did you discover that he was my son?"

She told him. She had an undefined idea that it was her duty to tell him, and an equally undefined impression that it might prove to her advantage, or to Daphne's, to do so. He disappointed her a little by manifesting no emotion; evidently he had divested himself of all paternal anxiety and affection. When she had concluded her tale, he laughed and remarked that nothing but fear of uttering an unpardonable platitude restrained him from commenting upon the smallness of the world which we inhabit.

"No doubt," he added, "you imagine that my resurrection has been in some way prompted by that young gentleman's discomfiture; the theory, I must confess, appears plausible. But you are wrong; I know nothing and care nothing about him. Perhaps,

however, I ought to apologise for having unintentionally made his path smooth. You do not, I presume, wish your daughter to marry him, and I am afraid you will scarcely be grateful to me for having cut the ground from under your feet."

"You have not done that," Mrs. Hamilton quickly protested. "You forbid me to announce that you are still alive, and while the story of your death remains uncontradicted, my objection to the marriage must stand."

"To be sure! Well, so much the better. For I cannot permit my existence to be announced, and I must confess that—selfish and insensible though I am—the notion of such a marriage smiles as little upon me as upon you."

"I don't quite see why you should oppose it," Mrs. Hamilton remarked, slightly nettled.

"My dear lady!—the daughter of a man who did his best to murder me!"

"You know very well that he never for one moment meant or wished to murder you!"

"Oh, excuse me. I must be allowed to have my own opinion upon a point which can never be cleared

up now. My opinion—I may be wrong, but that is my opinion—is that one does not knock a man over a sheer precipice without designs upon his life. It is likewise my opinion that Mr. Hamilton was a jealous husband, as well as a poor gamester and a worse swordsman. Our unexpected meeting and the gracious smile—I remember it as well as if I had seen it yesterday—with which you were so amiable as to greet me may have infuriated him, and——”

“That is as false as it is insolent!” cried Mrs. Hamilton, starting indignantly to her feet and making for the door.

But the so-called Herr Weiss placed himself between her and it, bowing low and spreading out hands of deprecation. “I apologise,” said he, “I abase myself before you! It is too true that I have all my life been prone to insolent manners. Let us take it for proved, then, that your husband was not jealous; assuredly he had no reason to be so. For the rest, dear madam, our hair is grey, and we have done with folly. It would indeed, be all the more foolish of us to quarrel since we are in complete agreement. You do not wish your daughter to marry my son,

while I—*versteht sich!*—should be revolted if my son were to marry your daughter.”

“Revolted! What a word to use!”

“Is that not good English? But at least it is comprehensible.”

“More comprehensible than polite. What I really cannot comprehend is your having any strong feeling, one way or the other, about a match which concerns you so little. Is it not rather inconsistent to take up that attitude immediately after asserting that you care nothing for your son?”

“I may be inconsistent; I have never prided myself upon consistency. You will allow, however, that I have gone out of my way to give some satisfaction to you and to my conscience. Are you going to reward me by declaring yourself in favour of an alliance which would shock the most callous sensibilities?”

Mrs. Hamilton was not, never had been and never could be, in favour of such an alliance; she said as much in emphatic terms. At the same time, she could not at all agree with Herr von Pardowitz in pronouncing it shocking or revolting. “It might have

been so if you had perished through an accident which, whatever you may be pleased to call it, was simply an unlucky accident; but since here you are, safe and sound!——”

“Mrs. Hamilton, you are preparing to surrender! No; do not deny it; your face and your voice tell me that you are. The young man has been dismissed, you will say. Yes; but he remains in this country, and means of communicating with him cannot be difficult to discover. Your daughter, I daresay, is inconsolable——”

“Not at all!”

“Well, then, my son is certainly inconsolable. He cannot be otherwise if your daughter resembles you, nor can he be willing to abandon hope without a struggle if he in any degree resembles me. The result in the case of one so tender-hearted as you are is easy to predict. This, then, is what one gains by obeying the voice of conscience! If, when I wrote those rather imprudent lines to you, Mrs. Hamilton, I had known what I know now, do you think that they would ever have been posted? Is it quite fair or honourable to take advantage of information

which nothing in the world compelled me to give you?"

She found herself, half against her will, arguing with the man, and endeavouring to conquer his unconquerable hostility. It was not—Heaven knew!—that she coveted Otto von Kahlenburg as a son-in-law; only she did not relish the sensation of being spurned by this very shady personage, who had already brought so much needless tribulation upon her, and who, it appeared, had added forgery to his other claims on the respect of the community. It would be natural enough for her to decline an obviously undesirable connection; but that he should presume to withhold a consent for which he had never been asked bordered upon impertinence. For the matter of that, he had always been impertinent, and years had effected but little improvement in his manners. He was also extraordinarily obstinate.

"No, my dear madam," said he, when she rose from her chair to conclude the interview, "you do not convince me. In spite of all your touching eloquence, I must formally and finally maintain my opposition."

"I am not eloquent, and nothing was further from my intention than to be touching," Mrs. Hamilton declared, with some heat; "but if I contemplated sending a message to your son—which I don't—I confess that your opposition would not deter me. What conceivable right have you, after all, to be considered? Why, you will not even—I suppose you dare not—acknowledge your son!"

Herr von Pardowitz bowed. "I recognise," he answered, "the full force of that reminder, as well as its generosity. I only wonder why you should ever have thought it your duty to separate two young people who were mutually attached. You always knew—so you say—that what took place on the Stelvio Pass was a mere accident; why, then, should the further unimportant accident of my having survived influence you? An accident is an accident, whatever its results may be, and an attempted murder is the same thing morally as a murder. Or do you think that it is a different thing?"

Mrs. Hamilton, *more feminino*, met this question by another. "If you talk about generosity, is it generous to take a weight off my mind only for the

sake of pointing out that it remains morally where it was? "

"I counted," replied von Pardowitz, with a grin, "upon your mind being unembarrassed by logic, and it appears that I did not count in vain. I may be permitted to add that I wished to relieve my own mind of a burden. Having accomplished that object, I have nothing more to say. Except, indeed, to repeat that if my son and your daughter ever become man and wife, they will do so by your will, in defiance of mine."

"You are a very wrong-headed person," said Mrs. Hamilton.

"Possibly. I am what I am."

She moved irresolutely towards the door. "I must consider what course I had better adopt. But don't you think that you ought to see your son? "

"For what good? On the contrary, many and powerful reasons place it beyond a doubt that I ought not to see him. No; I am, if you please, a dead man, and I shall now proceed to bury myself."

"But not this minute? "

"Why not? "

"Because—well, because I may want to have a little further conversation with you. Can you not stay a few more weeks in London?"

"Yes; I can do that—provided always that my identity is not revealed to the police. You realise, no doubt, the necessity for precaution, and I must ask you, in case you should propose to grant me the honour of a second visit, to kindly let me have twenty-four hours' notice of your intention. But I warn you that you will find me obdurate."

Mrs. Hamilton sighed impatiently. "Oh, if I come here again, it does not follow that I shall come with any desire to conquer your obduracy."

Nevertheless, she reflected, as soon as she was out of the house, that she could have no other object in revisiting Old Burlington Street. Perplexed and uncertain alike as to her duty and wishes, she said to herself (as she was wont to do at such moments) "I must consult Jack."

CHAPTER XIII.

IRRESOLUTION.

" I DO hope, my dear Jack," Mrs. Hamilton sat down and wrote immediately after her return home, " that you are not going to stay down in the country, shooting or sulking—whichever it is—much longer. For the oddest developments have arisen, and I am very badly in need of your advice respecting them. It is almost impossible to be more explicit by post ; but I may say that your plan of letting well, or ill, alone will not work. Owing to the developments that I have mentioned, something will have to be done without delay, and unless you can offer some suggestion as to what that shall be, I must fall back on my own judgment—which, as you will probably agree, is more likely than not to lead me astray."

" That," she mused, leaning back in her chair and laying down her pen, " ought to fetch him, I should

think. Whether he will be of any use, when fetched, depends of course upon what one may want him to say, and really I don't feel a bit certain what I want him to say!"

The entrance of her daughter, soon afterwards, did not help her much towards arriving at a conclusion. Daphne, whose demeanour continued to be unexceptionable and who displayed no outward visible signs of love-lorn distress, began by exclaiming:

"Dear mother, how worried you look! What have you been doing this afternoon?"

"I have been calling upon that tiresome Perkins woman," Mrs. Hamilton replied. "Mercifully, she wasn't at home."

"Is that all?"

Mrs. Hamilton longed to confess that that was not all; but considerations of the most ordinary prudence closed her lips. So she only remarked, "You can't be surprised if I occasionally look worried; the inexplicable thing is that *you* don't! Oh, I know what your idea is—least said soonest mended. Well, we have not said much, have we? Yet I can't help being afraid that you are inwardly fretting all the

time, and often I wonder whether you don't think that you have been badly treated."

The girl smiled and shook her head. "No; I don't think that I have been badly treated yet."

"What do you mean by 'yet'?"

"I only mean," answered Daphne, putting her arm round her mother's neck, "that, with the best and kindest intentions, you may make things harder to bear for me than they need be. We know, you and I, what is impossible, and we won't talk any more about it—why should we? But perhaps you don't know—I wish you did!—that alternatives are just as impossible."

"Ah, well! You are convinced, then—this is what I sometimes doubt, and I would rather be told exactly how you feel about it—that Herr von Pardowitz's son is impossible?"

Daphne, after a moment of hesitation, answered, "Yes; I am convinced. To be perfectly truthful, I am not sure that, if I had been left to myself, I should have felt quite as you do; for it seems to me that my father was as innocent as if he had

accidentally shot Herr von Pardowitz in some sporting expedition——”

“Oh, not quite as innocent as that!” Mrs. Hamilton parenthetically protested.

“But, at the same time, I fully understand and accept your view. You couldn’t, if you would, forget the past. All I ask you to believe is that I am in the same case. You haven’t grumbled all these years, and I am not grumbling now; only we must not, either of us, be expected to turn our backs upon ourselves or upon unalterable facts. The only thing to be done is to make the best of our life, such as it is.”

These sentiments and declarations were certainly not helpful to a wavering soul. Mrs. Hamilton, who, without insisting upon happiness for herself, claimed it on her daughter’s behalf, was tossed upon a sea of conflicting emotions, at one moment angry with Otto von Kahlenburg for having with such rapid facility brought about all this misery, at another irritated against his unjustifiably obstinate father, and then again doubtful whether the girl—whether any girl—ought to be taken seriously in proclaiming herself unchangeable. Thus she turned and turned until

Jack Clough—ever at command—made his appearance, with an expression of patient, resolute resignation upon his features. Mrs. Hamilton flew at him incontinently, glad to be able to vent her general dissatisfaction and displeasure upon somebody.

“Don’t look like that! you aren’t going to be argued with or upbraided. It is understood that your strength is to sit still, and you would sit still all the same, I imagine, even if it were your weakness. But that is just what I, unfortunately, can’t do; and I sent for you to explain why I can’t.”

“I am all attention,” said Jack.

“You are going to be all amazement. At least, I shall be very much disappointed if you are not.”

Jack Clough was apt to be, in more ways than one, a disappointing person. He listened without interruption or show of surprise to Mrs. Hamilton’s narrative of her interview with the revived von Pardowitz, and, when she had finished, all he said was, “Well, an episode of this kind is as important or as unimportant as you choose to make it.”

“What *can* you mean! Does it depend on me to say whether the situation is altered or not by

the removal of the one thing which made it what it was?"

"Oh, I think so. You maintained all along that your husband was virtually innocent; so proof of his innocence—if you accept this as proof—leaves you pretty much where you were, it seems to me. You are fortified, to be sure, by the objections of the resuscitated victim, whatever they may be worth. According to your account, he is as strongly against the match as you are."

"Yes; and I am bound to say that I think that is both impertinent and perverse of him."

"Ah! if that is what you think!——"

"What do you think yourself, Jack? Not about Herr von Pardowitz, who has really no sort of right to dictate to any of us, but about the whole affair? Ought I to tell Daphne that the man is alive? He has forbidden me to tell his son, and yet I almost feel as if it were my duty to tell his son. Please advise me."

"I should very much prefer," answered Jack slowly, "to offer you no advice."

"I am sure you would! But I cannot allow you

to be so shabby as that, and I must insist upon your saying something. I am not, after all, compelled to take your advice."

"Well, then, I should not, if I were you, make any revelations to von Kahlenburg. If you are prepared to welcome him as your future son-in-law, he probably won't be curious as to the reason of your welcome, and a father who is liable to be arrested for forgery can scarcely be regarded in the light of an agreeable wedding-gift. It follows as a matter of course that your daughter will have to be kept in the dark. In short, as I said before, the question is absolutely one for your own decision. Personally, I don't see that it has been affected, one way or the other, by this man's reappearance."

"Surely you must admit that his reappearance at this particular moment looks providential."

"I suppose it does look so to you; but if Providence is taking a hand in the business, one's individual responsibility seems to be a good deal diminished. Upon the whole, it is perhaps safer to assume that you are free to act as you think best. Do you want your daughter to marry von Kahlenburg?"

"You know I don't!"

"I know that, generally speaking, you want what she wants—and quite right too."

"It wouldn't be so very unnatural if I did, would it? But it is most unnatural, most absurd of *you* to take up that line!"

"Who says I have taken up that line? I will go so far as to confess that I should personally rejoice if Miss Daphne could see her way to throw our young friend over; but I don't think she will, and I don't think that at the bottom of your heart you are as eager as you were that she should. Therefore I won't suggest that you should open communications with his uncle, who would pretty certainly back you up in throwing cold water upon him. These Austrians have mediæval notions upon the subject of social position."

Mrs. Hamilton rose like a trout at a May fly. "Social position; I don't wish to give myself airs, but I really do think that my daughter may make so bold as to claim equality with a forger's son! No; I shall not apply to your friend's uncle for support, thank you, and it is evident that I must not expect

any from you either. I don't want Daphne to marry the man, and, in spite of what you say, you are well aware that I don't; yet if you refuse to help me!——"

"I hardly see how I can," said Jack.

"Oh, go away!—you are worse than useless! Don't blame me for anything that may come to pass now, that's all. One thing, at any rate, will come to pass immediately; I shall look up this odious von Pardowitz again and tell him that I don't care a straw for his impudent veto."

"I thought you would," remarked Jack tranquilly.

He then obeyed orders and went away, saying to himself, as he descended the stairs, "All this is atrocious—or excellent—according to the standpoint of the observer. But what I should like to know is, where do I come in?"

To which pertinent query echo returned no answer.

CHAPTER XIV.

CAJOLERY.

MRS. HAMILTON (having, as requested, given due notice of her impending visit) dismissed the hansom which had brought her to Old Burlington Street, and rang Herr Weiss's door-bell. If she did not know with anything approaching accuracy what were the motives which had prompted her to take this step, their extremely involved character may count as some excuse for her ignorance. A heartfelt longing that Daphne should, by hook or by crook, be made happy, was perhaps the most legitimate of them; a strong desire to teach Herr von Pardowitz his proper place was another; a vague hope that he might insist upon his paternal rights, reveal himself to his son, and put an end to everything by forbidding a marriage which could hardly take place in defiance of his expressed will was a third. Finally,

she was of opinion that Jack Clough deserved to be punished for his intolerable toleration. That the above aims were somewhat difficult to reconcile did not prevent her from being influenced by them, jointly and severally, nor did she display any embarrassment on being received with a bow and an interrogative smile by the tenant of the little sitting-room on the ground floor.

"I have come," she quietly but firmly announced, "to tell you, that after giving the subject full consideration, I have decided to do what I think best for my daughter, without any reference to your prejudices."

He raised his eyebrows. "Indeed! You have decided, then, to hand your daughter over to my son?"

"Not at all. But, so far as you are concerned, I think it only right to say what I have just said."

"Madam, to use your English phrase, I forbid the banns."

"That phrase is altogether meaningless and out of place in the present instance. You do not seem to

understand that you can neither forbid me nor order me to do anything!"

"A thousand pardons! I can forbid and I can order. I cannot, it is true, enforce obedience; but I should have hoped that your own sense of what is proper and fitting——"

"Oh, as for that, you must allow me to say that I recognise no impropriety—none whatever—in the matter. If I thought your son satisfactory in other respects—I do not think him so, but if I did—your forbidding the banns, as you so absurdly put it, would certainly not make me hesitate to send for him."

"Very well, my dear madam; I have confessed that I cannot effectively oppose you. I can only thank you for your obliging candour, and hope, for your sake and the young lady's, that my son will come when you send for him."

"Why should he not? Do you mean that you will try to prevent him?" asked Mrs. Hamilton suspiciously.

"I have no means of preventing him; I merely assume that he resembles other young men, and I

happen to retain a vivid recollection of what his admirable father was, when a young man. Were I you, therefore, I should lose no time in hinting to him that he need not despair, and anticipating the consolations which are sure to be offered to him from other quarters. It is really not wise to count upon any long continuance of despair at a time of life when despair is against nature. But why should I give you good advice? I have already, as you will allow, rendered you some slight service, which has not been too graciously acknowledged. It only remains for me to repeat my useless prohibition and withdraw into the obscurity from which I have been tempted—chiefly on your account—to emerge for a moment.”

Mrs. Hamilton felt a little ashamed of herself. “From the moment that you cease to dictate to me,” she said, in a more amiable tone, “I am willing to admit that you have some rights as a father. They are rather shadowy rights, no doubt; still, such as they are, they exist, and I own that I should prefer to have your sanction—always supposing that any need should arise for your sanction and mine. Why

will you not see your son, and talk things over with him? You cannot surely be afraid of his giving information to the police!"

But this bid for release from responsibility met with no success. There were so many impediments in the way of the course suggested, Herr von Pardowitz declared, that he could not think of detaining Mrs. Hamilton by an enumeration of them. It must suffice to assert very decidedly, very finally, that nothing would induce him to see his son. He had stated what his wishes and feelings were; he regretted that they did not accord with hers. Was there anything more to be said?

Thus his visitor went her way, without having attained one of the objects of her visit, save the discomfiture of Herr von Pardowitz. And even that could scarcely be accounted complete. Whether she wished to complete it or not was just what she did not know; but she certainly had not—for some reason or other—relished that malicious insinuation of his that Otto might already be seeking consolation elsewhere. If action were to be taken at all, it ought perhaps to be taken speedily.

Mrs. Perkins obligingly, if unintentionally, gave her a helping hand.

On the following afternoon Mrs. Perkins was offering light refreshments to "a *very* few, *very* intimate friends" (they were so described in her note of invitation), whose inspection of Rosie's numerous and costly wedding-gifts was incidentally requested, and almost the first person by whom Mrs. Hamilton was jostled when she responded to that delicate hint, bearing a hastily-purchased carriage-clock in her hand, was Otto von Kahlenburg. He could not help jostling her, because the throng in the little room and even on the landing outside was so dense, and because Mrs. Perkins, plunging forward, like a porpoise through a shoal of mackerel, to greet the latest arrival, threw him momentarily off his balance. But he preserved his mental balance admirably, and it was impossible to avoid feeling grateful to him for behaving, as he did, quite like a gentleman. He bowed, smiled, apologised, and seemed to see no reason why he should not accost Mrs. Hamilton and her daughter as usual.

There was, of course, no reason why he should

not, except that men so much more often than women forget or disregard the inquisitive gaze of their neighbours. Jack Clough, for example, who was standing hard by, watched this chance encounter with a visible apprehension for which his old friend would willingly have boxed his ears. When, therefore, she had shaken off her voluble hostess, and when the carriage-clock had been added to the other displayed trophies, Mrs. Hamilton, noticing that young von Kahlenburg was still close to her elbow, rewarded his tact by addressing a few gracious words to him.

"You have been away, shooting, somewhere, haven't you? I hope you had good sport? What a terrific squash! I should not have thought that anybody in the world had such a number of intimates; but Mrs. Perkins says we all come under that head."

"We do not all deserve it," answered the young man, laughing and lowering his voice confidentially. "To be intimate!—one sees very well what that means, and one ought to have guessed in advance. But I am forgiven. I explained that I had been in the country, and I begged Mrs. Perkins to tell me what she thought Miss Rosie would like."

"How imprudent of you! Did she say a diamond necklace?"

"Oh, no; it was not so bad as that. But she did say that, since I was so kind as to ask, she thought I could not go wrong with some small article of jewellery. So now I am wondering how small an article of jewellery I can select without going wrong. Clough has behaved very handsomely; he has purchased the exquisite necklace of Etruscan design which you will be asked to admire presently, and he declines to tell me what he paid for it. But naturally a good deal is expected of Clough, whose attentions to another member of the family have been rather marked."

"Jack!" exclaimed Mrs. Hamilton, turning half laughing, half aghast, to the donor of the Etruscan necklace, "have you taken leave of your senses?"

She hastily drew him away (perhaps that was what the bold and astute Otto had intended her to do), and so it came about that Daphne soon found herself seated half-way up the narrow, dimly-lighted staircase, with her rejected lover by her side. Mrs. Perkins's guests, busy with tea, coffee, cakes and

gossip, did not appear to notice the couple, nor did the couple trouble themselves much about Mrs. Perkins's guests. They had things to say to one another which were of the utmost interest and importance to them both, though of so little to anybody else that it seems superfluous to record their mutual questions and answers. These were of a nature easily divined, and the exchange of the same, by the space of ten minutes or so, gave reciprocal satisfaction; but what was a trifle less satisfactory to the sanguine Otto was to be reminded that the situation remained quite unaltered thereby.

"Our talking like this just for once," Daphne observed, "can't do any great harm; only we mustn't make a practice of it. We had better get into the way of meeting as friends—which is what I hope we shall be to the end of our days. I don't in the least hope for anything more, you know."

"You don't hope!" ejaculated Otto reproachfully.

"No; because there isn't, and there never can be, any hope of more."

"Not if Mrs. Hamilton were to capitulate?"

The girl shook her head. "Not even then. I

know well enough that she would like to capitulate if she could, poor dear! and I was glad to see that she was trying her very best to be nice with you just now; but it would be impossible for us to accept a concession which would make her perfectly miserable."

"It would not be impossible for me," Otto confessed. "I don't see why our happiness should make her miserable, and I don't believe it would. Like hundreds and thousands of other women, she is the victim of a fixed idea; once get that idea out of her head and the whole problem is solved."

"What problem?" Daphne inquired.

He laughed. "The problem of how to please her and please ourselves at one and the same time. That may be too hard a task for us, and we may fail at it; but for her sake just as much as for ours, we ought not to let it beat us without a struggle."

"Only we practically promised not to struggle."

"Well, I don't remember precisely what was said; but I am sure that it amounted to no more than that we submitted to her decision. Suppose she should repent of her decision?"

"Perhaps she does half repent already; I almost think she does. And if we took advantage of that to extort an unwilling surrender from her, she would soon repent of having repented. Don't you understand why I say that there can never be any hope for us?"

"No," answered the young man rather doggedly; "I don't. I should understand if your mother were in the right; but she is not. She is in the wrong; she has taken up a distorted notion of things, and if I can by any means persuade her to see them as they really are, I shall."

"After which you will have to persuade me that my notions are distorted."

"But, Daphne, you have confessed that you don't agree with her. Do you mean that you think yourself bound to comply with her wishes, whether they are reasonable or unreasonable? Because, at that rate, you would be bound to marry Clough."

The girl burst out laughing. "Oh, how ridiculous!"

"Not so ridiculous as you suppose. Fortunately our excellent Clough, who has the bad taste not to be in love with you, will not ask you to marry him;

but you may take my word for it that Mrs. Hamilton still hopes he will. Indeed if it were not for Clough——”

He was prevented from concluding his sentence by the advent of Captain Clough himself, who announced that he had been sent to discover Miss Hamilton and tell her that her mother wanted to go away.

“I myself,” he meekly added, “should like very much to go away; only nobody will give me a lead.”

“We will all go away together,” Otto declared, jumping up. “We will walk away, as it is such a fine evening, don’t you think so? Clough, you must tell Mrs. Hamilton, like a good fellow, that it is a fine evening, and that we had much better walk away. Then perhaps the ladies will be so very kind as to come with us to the nearest jewellers and help me to choose something showy and not too costly to lay at Miss Rosie’s feet.”

CHAPTER XV.

STRATEGY.

"MARK my words," said Mrs. Perkins to her daughters, after the last of her guests had departed, "there is more in all this than meets the eye! I mean, of course, about the Hamiltons and Count von Kahlenburg. What is one to think? First of all we have them tearing off helter-skelter from Marienbad at a moment's notice, in order to escape from him; then he follows them to London; then we are given to understand—for Mrs. Hamilton certainly did give me to understand as much—that they have seen nothing of him, and he himself pretends that he has been down in the country, shooting, ever since he arrived in England; whereas I happen to know—but I will come to that presently. Finally, when we contrive to bring about a meeting, they

are not a bit perturbed or taken aback, as one might have expected them to be, but behave like the best of friends."

Mrs. Perkins checked off these several events upon her podgy fingers, as if they had been so many counts in a damning indictment, and wound up by repeating solemnly, "What is one to think?"

Neither Minnie or Rosie could imagine, and the former reported that she had been unable to extract any information from Captain Clough, who had been goaded, it appeared, into declaring, "almost rudely," that Mrs. Hamilton's affairs were no business of his.

"Which of itself proves," remarked Mrs. Perkins, "that he knows more than he chooses to let out. Mrs. Hamilton, I am quite sure, tells him all that there is to tell about everything. Moreover, unless I am much mistaken, it was he who bounced out of 95 Old Burlington Street, and dived into a hansom, as I was passing the door last night."

"Who lives at 95 Old Burlington Street?" Minnie inquired.

"Ah!—who? That is just what wants clearing

up. There are apartments to let there on the first floor ; so I ascertained from the landlady. The ground floor rooms, it seems, are occupied by an old German, who gives very little trouble, but is said to be rather eccentric in his habits. A lady, who did not give her name, has twice been to see him. Well, I knew that, and I also knew, though of course I kept my knowledge to myself, that the lady's name was—Mrs. Hamilton ! On two separate occasions has she entered that house under my very nose.”

“ But why shouldn't she ? ” asked the good-natured Minnie.

“ Oh, my dear, I am far from saying that there is any reason why she shouldn't ; only one can't help wondering why she did. Why all this secrecy ? Why these surreptitious ways of going on ? For although I cannot positively swear to having recognised either Captain Clough or Herr von Kahlenburg, I am to all intents and purposes certain that I have seen them both emerge from that house. On these dark afternoons, and with the streets so wretchedly lighted, it is impossible to swear to anybody's back ; still there are not many backs in Lon-

don as flat as Herr von Kahlenburg's, and that way of walking with the knees scarcely bent is quite Austrian. The only thing was that, as he passed under a gas lamp, I fancied I saw white hair under his hat."

"Then," cried Rosie, with swift divination, "it must have been his uncle!—it must have been the old Count! Oh, how interesting!"

"You must not imagine," returned her mother, "that that possibility did not at once occur to me; but, upon the whole, I am inclined to doubt whether old Count von Kahlenburg, who is a rich man, would take up such modest quarters. At any rate, if he has, he has assumed a feigned name; for the old German who is staying at 95 Old Burlington Street, is known as Herr Weiss. Therefore, as I began by saying, it is evident that there is more in this than meets the eye."

A good deal, it will be observed, had already met Mrs. Perkins's vigilant eye, which she assured her daughters that she would continue to keep on the alert. Whether she was mistaken or not in her conviction that she had seen Captain Clough quit the

Old Burlington Street house of mystery, certain it is that no mention of such a visit on his part was made by Jack to Mrs. Hamilton, whom (in pursuance of instructions received) he had escorted towards Bond Street on foot half an hour earlier.

"You see how it is," that perplexed lady said impatiently, after giving him a summary of her last conversation with Herr von Pardowitz; "that aggravating man won't help me; you won't help me; the whole responsibility is thrown upon my shoulders; and so—what am I to do?"

"It seems simple enough," answered Jack. "You need not—indeed, you obviously must not—give your reasons; all you have to do is to tell those two young people who have marched on ahead that you no longer feel as you did about their becoming man and wife. You see, they never felt as you did, and the fact that you withdraw your objection will entirely satisfy them, I have no doubt."

"But I still object; I haven't at all given up objecting. Nor has Herr von Pardowitz."

"Who can't enforce his objections."

"He could, if he would only consent to see his

son. After all, a father is a father, even though he may have been a forger into the bargain."

"I am afraid," said Jack, "you won't get out of your difficulties in that way. But why treat it as a difficulty at all? Why not do what in your heart you want to do, and make your daughter happy?"

"Of course I want to make her happy; but the difficulty is, as you very well understand, that I want to make her happy in a different way," said Mrs. Hamilton, plaintively.

"So do I," answered Jack, with a short, abrupt laugh. "Well, we can't have what we want, that's all."

"If I were a man," Mrs. Hamilton declared, "I should insist upon having what I wanted."

"As far as my experience goes, it is generally the women who insist, and I should always be inclined to back them. But, however that may be, I am not going to make an absolute fool of myself and vex Miss Daphne by pestering her with my futile attentions."

"Jack," said Mrs. Hamilton, "you may be, and I believe you are, a most kind-hearted and unselfish

person ; but as a friend and adviser you don't shine—really you don't. Since you refuse to fight your own battles, I renounce all idea of fighting them for you. If the worst comes to the worst, you must blame yourself for it, not me."

Jack blamed nobody ; not even his audacious young friend, who, after turning the corner into Bond Street with Daphne, had disappeared from view. "Oh, they are all right ; they haven't eloped," he assured his perturbed companion ; "the girl who would elope, taking nothing with her but the clothes on her back, doesn't breathe in these days. We shall come across them presently, flattening their noses against a shop window."

As a matter of fact, some five minutes elapsed before young von Kahlenburg, full of apologies and short of breath, dashed across the street to explain that Miss Hamilton and he had inadvertently headed for Oxford street, instead of Piccadilly. They had, however, seen a gold bracelet which looked as if it would do. Would Mrs. Hamilton kindly inspect it, and pardon them for having alarmed her ?

"Oh, I'll inspect your bracelet, if you like," an-

swered that sorely-tried lady resignedly. "As for pardoning people who alarm me, it seems to me that my life is chiefly spent in doing that."

"Because you are so given to taking alarm without any reason," remarked the unsympathising Jack.

If he himself had been equally susceptible, he might have found some reasonable excuse for disquietude in Daphne's slightly heightened colour and humid eyes when the jewellers' shop, at the entrance of which she was awaiting her mother, was reached; but perhaps he already knew as much as, or more than, her face could tell him. Mrs. Hamilton, for her part, either did not notice or did not choose to notice symptoms which should have struck her as significant. Mrs. Hamilton, truth to tell, was for the moment out of all patience with her impassive friend, and was not unwilling to hint to him that two could play at the game of enduring what he would not essay to cure.

Moreover, Otto dealt adroitly with her. He was clever enough to perceive that his best chance lay in ignoring the delicacy of the situation and behaving as any casual acquaintance who desired to be assisted

in the choice of a wedding-present might have behaved; clever enough, too, to realise the importance of making Mrs. Hamilton laugh. It is scarcely possible to be rude, chilling or repellent to a man who has thrown you into convulsions of merriment, and this effect his admirable powers of mimicry enabled him to produce upon a lady whose sense of the ridiculous had always been acute. While bracelets of various designs were being spread out upon the velvet-covered counter, he drew a prophetic pantomimic picture of Mrs. Perkins, receiving and appraising the gift, which was so true to life as to be scarcely a caricature. Difficult as it must be for a tall and slim young man to make himself resemble a fat old woman, he contrived, by some indescribable means, to transform his comely features into an exact reproduction of his late entertainer's round, rubicund countenance, while he imitated her voice with a fidelity which might have taken in her own daughters. Also he personated Minnie and Rosie in a style which drew the somewhat grudging tribute of a guffaw from Jack Clough, little though the latter was disposed just then to enjoy tomfoolery.

The bracelet was eventually selected—to an accompaniment of cheers and laughter—Jack was told to call a hansom for the ladies, and Otto, profiting by his opportunity, said, in a matter-of-course tone of voice, “May I call upon you one afternoon before I leave London, Mrs. Hamilton?”

“Oh, certainly,” was the slightly hesitating reply that he received. “We are very often out in the afternoons, but——”

“Never mind that!” interrupted the young man cheerfully; “I’ll keep on calling until I find you at home. I couldn’t be better employed.”

Perhaps not; perhaps he had better call as soon as possible; perhaps it was useless to fight any longer against obvious destiny. These thoughts passed rapidly through Mrs. Hamilton’s mind, as she stepped into the hansom; but at the last moment a movement of compunction, a futile longing to clutch at straws, prompted her to lean forward and beckon to Jack.

“What are you doing to-morrow evening?” she hurriedly asked. “Won’t you come and dine with us? Do come, if you can.”

He accepted the invitation, mentally discarding a previous engagement which he had no business to discard, and, on being left with von Kahlenburg, remarked: "Well, you are a talented miscreant. Your talents must be acknowledged, though I can't altogether admire the use to which you put them."

"Your admiration isn't asked for," returned the other, with a grin.

"Nor my assistance either, I suppose."

"Oh, you have given me your assistance, my more than excellent Clough, and you will continue to give it to me I know, up to the end! But the end is in sight now, eh? Don't you think the end is in sight?"

"I think it is," answered Jack drily.

Meanwhile, in the obscurity of the swiftly-rolling hansom, Mrs. Hamilton's hand went out to clasp her daughter's. "Oh, Daphne," she murmured, "haven't I behaved like a goose—haven't we behaved like a pair of geese—this afternoon?"

"Not a bit," answered the girl. "Our having chanced to meet him has altered nothing, and it was so much wiser to be friendly, as you were, than to

hold him at arm's length. Why should we not be friends with him? After all, he has done us no injury."

"Ah, but will he rest satisfied with being our friend? What did he say to you while you were sitting with him on those grubby stairs (your gown will bear the marks to its dying day, I expect) and when you pretended to lose your way with him in Bond Street?"

"I am not going to tell you, mother," answered Daphne, laughing; "but what I can tell you is that you need not be in the least afraid of anything that he may say. So please don't be out when he calls—if he does call."

CHAPTER XVI.

INCREDULITY.

WHEN Jack arrived at Palace Gate on the ensuing evening, he found Mrs. Bingham reading a newspaper in the drawing-room, all by herself.

"This is an uncovenanted mercy!" he pleasantly remarked.

"I suppose it is," returned the old lady, peering at him over her spectacles. "Still you might have known that somebody would be required to make up the indispensable *partie carrée*. That, I take it, is why I was hurriedly invited. Likewise, that is why I accepted; for I am a good-natured old soul, as you are aware."

"I am aware," answered the gallant Jack, "that your society is universally prized for its own sake. Your hostess might have paid you the compliment of being in the room to receive you, all the same."

"Oh, I'm not affronted," said Mrs. Bingham tolerantly; "what is the use of being a widow if you are to be a slave to punctuality? Personally, I can't help being punctual, and I have given up trying. If I am asked to dine at eight o'clock, in I walk as the clock strikes, knowing full well that I shall get nothing to eat for three-quarters of an hour. Your military training puts you in the same boat, I daresay. Well, since here we both are, and since we are not likely to be interrupted yet awhile, tell me what you are going to do. Do you, or don't you, mean to profit by this chance, which has been offered you with almost unseemly ostentation, and which in all probability will be your last?"

"I doubt," answered Jack, "whether there is any profit to be got out of it. How far are you acquainted with the circumstances, I wonder?"

"So do I. But I am acquainted, anyhow, with Mrs. Hamilton, not to mention Mrs. Perkins, and I have heard a good deal about your young Austrian rival. Come, now! what is the sense of being faint-hearted? You are backed by the mother; you are—how shall I put it?—liked and trusted by the

daughter; the most formidable obstacle in your path is simply your own absurd, misplaced modesty."

"I can't see that my modesty is misplaced. To be liked and trusted is all very well, but, unfortunately, that is not enough, nor nearly enough."

"Don't you believe it! You are only a man, so you are no judge. As an old woman, I flatter myself that I know a vast deal more about my own sex than you do, and you may take my word for it that, in nine cases out of ten, affection and trust are quite enough for us. We have our fancies and romances, like you, and they last about as long as yours do; the difference between us is that we can be perfectly happy when mated with a person whom we don't romantically adore, whereas you can't. Don't bother your head about the Austrian (who is out of the question, I understand), and don't ask the girl for more than she can be expected to promise at present. Unless I am much mistaken, she may be expected to accept you, and before you have been married a month, she will be as devoted to you as you can desire. It is a mere question of not being

too proud or too humble—whichever you like to call it—this evening.”

“I am afraid I must be one or the other, for I don’t feel at all tempted to take your advice,” said Jack.

“Then the impossible Austrian will, somehow or other, be converted into possibility, that’s all. I have known Mary Hamilton for many years, and I can gauge the length of her foot to a nicety. She will give in, not because she believes that it will be for her daughter’s happiness—which it won’t—to marry a foreigner, whose people are pretty certain to object to the match, but because she has never been able to deny the girl anything without providing some equivalent. You are more than an equivalent; you know you are, and so does she, and so, in due season, will Daphne. Only I suspect that there is no time to be lost. You had better, as I told you just now, assume that this is your last chance. If you let it slip, I believe, upon my honour and conscience, that you will be selfish, as well as foolish. These are words of wisdom and truth; ponder them during dinner.”

He pondered them during dinner, which accounted for a taciturnity on his part somewhat provoking to the lady of the house. Mrs. Bingham's counsel was, of course, based upon insufficient knowledge of the case; yet there was—or there might be—something in it. In the abstract, Daphne would doubtless do better for herself by espousing an English gentleman who adored her than by linking her fortunes with those of a rather flighty young Austrian, whose uncle would very probably evince displeasure by keeping him on short commons. Perhaps, too—though this was a little difficult to admit—he could, without treachery to Otto, ascertain the girl's own views; perhaps he would neither injure her nor anybody else by avowing that he loved her.

Every facility for making that avowal was, it need scarcely be said, granted to him. The grand piano in the back drawing-room, at which Daphne seated herself later in the evening, was capable of dominating any conversation that might be held in its neighbourhood, and, to make assurance doubly sure, Mrs. Hamilton and Mrs. Bingham went off to the former's bedroom for the ostensible purpose of inspecting cer-

tain newly-purchased articles of apparel. Thereupon Daphne ceased playing, while her companion, with abrupt promptitude, came to the point.

"I shouldn't wonder if you knew," he began, "why your mother asked me to dine to-night."

She laughed apologetically. "I am afraid I do. Poor mother! It is rather ridiculous, isn't it? Kindly meant, though."

Rather ridiculous! Well, yes; inasmuch as she pronounced it ridiculous, it inevitably became so. Nevertheless, he could not, now that he had made a start, choose but persevere.

"Whatever it may be," said he, "it is a thing to be taken seriously. You don't know, but I want you to know, that I should have asked you to marry me long ago if I hadn't seen that there wasn't the faintest hope of your accepting me. What I want to say now is that here I am, and here—in a metaphorical sense—I shall always be. There is no need to tell me that you don't care for me as I care for you; I am very well aware of that, and Mrs. Bingham is of opinion that it doesn't matter. Personally, I should have thought it did; but——"

"Oh, but you *know* it does!" exclaimed Daphne. "I quite understand why you are making me this offer, and I am grateful to you for your generosity, and it is possible—I don't say it is likely, still it is just possible—that I might hesitate, but for the one absolutely fatal objection that you know of—which is that I care for somebody else."

"To whom also there are certain objections. Not necessarily fatal ones, I admit."

"Oh, they are fatal. I have been thinking them over, and I see that they must be, and ought to be, fatal, notwithstanding my poor dear mother's reluctant wavering, which was quite as evident to me as it was to you and him yesterday. That only means that she can't bear to break my heart. But she won't break my heart, and I should never forgive myself if I were to break hers by marrying the son of a man whom she is persuaded that my father murdered."

The survival of Herr von Pardowitz remained a secret to Daphne, then. This did not surprise Jack, who was cognizant of reasons for her having been kept in ignorance; but he deemed himself entitled to say:

"Setting that aside, other objections exist. The difference of nationality and religion, for one; the not improbable hostility of old Count von Kahlenburg, for another."

Daphne dismissed these with a wave of her hand. "They are nothing! they don't count!"

"As little, I suppose, as my love for you; though perhaps that might count, some day, for what it is worth. It has, I think, a sort of value as a *pis-aller*. At any rate, as I told you just now, here it will always be, ready for you to fall back upon, and entirely, unreservedly, at your service."

"Captain Clough," said Daphne gravely. "I don't like you to make such statements. It sounds odious of me to say that they are not true, when you are making them, as I firmly believe you are, out of pure kindness and a wish to spare me other troubles which you foresee; but don't you understand that I should be much more unhappy than I am if I thought that they were true?"

Jack smiled. "Let us assume that they are false then. From the moment that they make you unhappy, they lose their *raison d'être*."

"Didn't I tell you so!" cried the girl triumphantly. "Of course you only wanted to provide me with a loophole, and though it stands to reason that I can't accept, I don't appreciate your extraordinary disinterestedness any the less. But for the minute you really frightened me!"

"Did I? Well, at the risk of frightening you again, I must repeat that if ever you should feel the need of such a person as a devoted husband, who labours under the disadvantage of not being Otto von Kahlenburg, you will find him in my skin. That, at all events, is a true statement, and I don't see why it should be considered either an alarming or a disinterested one."

"Thank you," answered Daphne, hesitatingly; "but you see—I shall never feel the need of such a person."

"Who knows? It is most unlikely that you ever will, though. And as for your mother's wavering, let me just say that, in my humble opinion, she does well to waver. No sane human being could suppose that your father was really a murderer; so it is to be hoped, and I believe it may be expected, that she will shake off that delusion."

If Mrs. Hamilton had believed or expected that Jack Clough would succeed in the forlorn hope which he had been invited to undertake, his precipitate departure must at least have enabled her to shake off that delusion.

"And a good thing too!" he muttered to himself, as he left the house. "Now that I am finally and irrevocably out of it, the way is clear, and we may proceed to the concluding act of the comedy."

CHAPTER XVII.

COMPLICATION.

"My dear child," said Mrs. Hamilton, laughing with the tears in her eyes, "you needn't look so penitent about it; he has only himself to thank, and I have only him to blame. Oh, don't tell me that he couldn't have made you fall in love with him, if he had had the heart of a mouse. Of course he could! He is well off, he is still young, he has all the domestic virtues, his family is a most respectable one, and he is decidedly good-looking—honestly, now, wouldn't you say that he had more than the average share of good looks?"

"Oh, yes," answered Daphne, smiling down upon her mother, who had subsided into a low chair after Jack's exit had been followed by that of Mrs. Bingham; "if it comes to that, Captain Clough is better looking than—many other people."

"I quite agree with you, my dear. And can it be pretended that a man like that hasn't it in his power to make any girl in the world fall in love with him?"

"Perhaps he would have to begin by being in love with the girl."

"The exasperating part of it is that he *is* in love! No, but really and truly in love; though I don't wonder at your doubting it. Well, I give him up; I wash my hands of him; I have played my last card!"

"You know, mother dear," Daphne resumed, after a short pause, "it wouldn't, and couldn't, have made any difference if he had been ever so devoted a lover."

"I am not so absolutely certain of that," sighed Mrs. Hamilton; "still, of course, I know what I know. And I am beginning—I may as well confess it—to see that there can be only one end to all this."

"Ah, there you are wrong, mother! I don't ask, I don't even wish, to be allowed to marry Otto; I only want it to be understood that I shall never marry anybody else."

"That is so absurd!"

"I don't think it is."

"You would if you knew all. That is, you would think me absurd for objecting to your marrying him. But I am going to withdraw my objections; I feel that I must. They are not, in point of fact, as strong or as conclusive as I imagined that they were."

"Oh, don't say that!" exclaimed Daphne; "you make me feel such a wretch! It is tiresome of me—I fully realise how tiresome it must be—to proclaim that I intend to remain single; but I can't help it, and you are not to suppose, please, that I consider myself a martyr. Feeling as you do, and as it is quite natural that you should, you can't really think that your objections are a bit less conclusive now than they have been all along; so I mustn't allow you to withdraw them."

Mrs. Hamilton moved uneasily in her chair. To reveal the fact that the supposed victim of the Stelvio Pass was alive and well would be to introduce all manner of fresh complications into a situation already complicated enough; yet it seemed scarcely honest to keep silence upon the subject. She ended
ning irritably:

it is sufficient for me to say that I no

longer object! Must I go down on my knees and beg you to do what you are dying to do?"

"I am not dying to marry Otto," Daphne declared. "If I were to marry him against your wishes—because it would be against them, whatever you may choose to say—I should never be happy; nor, I think, would he. The greatest kindness you can show me, mother, is not to tempt me any more. You and he do tempt me a little; I won't deny it. Only I know very well all the time that I should lay up future remorse for myself and sorrow for you by taking you at your word; therefore, I am not going to take you at your word. Let us say no more about it."

For that evening, at all events, they said no more about it; and if they both slept badly, what else could they expect? Self-sacrifice is perhaps the least immediately remunerative of all virtues; for nobody can practise it without a discouraging and only too well-founded suspicion that it is most unlikely to be appreciated. Mrs. Hamilton was, upon the whole, less to be pitied than her daughter, inasmuch as she foresaw a more or less satisfactory termination to the affair. Otto von Kahlenburg was not, to be

sure, the son-in-law whom she would have chosen, had she been at liberty to choose ; yet she was conscious of a personal liking for the young fellow, and she did not doubt that he would contrive to vanquish Daphne's lingering scruples. As for the forger of Old Burlington Street, he was at once a blessing and a bore—negligible, for the rest, in both capacities, seeing that he was precluded from stepping forward into the light.

Now, it came to pass on the next afternoon that, while she was reconciling herself to coming events with the aid of a cup of tea, a visiting-card of unusually large dimensions was brought to her. The gentleman whose name it displayed amidst caligraphic flourishes wished, she was told, to know whether Mrs. Hamilton was disengaged and would do him the favour to receive him. She replied in the affirmative, taking it for granted that "Graf von Kahlenburg-Lindenhausen" was the person with whom her thoughts happened at the moment to be engaged ; so that she was somewhat startled when there presently stalked into the room a tall, stalwart individual, white-moustached and white-whiskered, who bowed

low and apologised in a strong Teutonic accent for his intrusion.

"Permit me," he said, "to account for myself and excuse myself by informing you that Otto von Kahlenburg is my nephew and my adopted son. Also that I have travelled all the way from Vienna for the purpose of soliciting an audience."

"Please sit down," answered Mrs. Hamilton, instantly divining that an attack in force was about to be made upon her, and fixing bayonets, so to speak, in order to receive the same in a style due to herself. For, however little ambitious she might be of an alliance with the von Kahlenburg family, she had no notion of submitting tamely to impertinent accusations, and Jack Clough's hints respecting the arrogance of the Austrian nobility had prepared her for something of the kind.

The old gentleman (who was a spruce, pleasant-looking old gentleman and who evidently employed a good tailor) sat down and unfolded his case with engaging candour. He did not, he said, pretend to exercise absolute control over his nephew; although, as the head of a family which enjoyed a certain

distinction in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, he was socially, if not legally, entitled to make his voice heard in matters affecting the welfare of that family. Over his personal fortune and the greater part of his landed property he did hold complete authority, and could dispose of these by will in any manner that might seem best to him ; so that if, for example, his nephew were to contract a marriage of which he was unable to approve, nothing would be more simple for him than to cancel the will under which his nephew would profit to a handsome extent at his death. Very well ; then would Mrs. Hamilton, as a woman of the world, kindly ask herself whether an alliance with an untitled English lady—doubtless charming, yet just as unquestionably an alien and a heretic—could be viewed with favour by the existing chief of the von Kahlenburgs ? “ My nephew has not disguised from me his wish to make such an alliance ; I know that he is now in England with the hope and intention of making it, in spite of my disapproval, and his silence since he reached this country has caused me very great uneasiness. He left me, I should tell you, protesting that he had no

definite plan, except to keep various shooting engagements, that he could not even say whether Miss Hamilton was in London or not, and that he had reason to doubt whether his suit would be entertained, supposing that he should find an occasion to—how do you say?—to push it forth. Therefore I have thought to myself, ‘Good! I will not interfere with the chance of his failure or rejection.’ But when I heard—oh, not from him, naturally, but through other channels—that he has been a frequent visitor at your house, it became imperative upon me to act without delay. Without delay, I take a straightforward course. I give orders to pack my portmanteau, I start direct for London, I throw myself, madam, upon your good feeling! Dare I hope that I do not arrive too late?”

“I assure you,” said Mrs. Hamilton coldly, “that you cannot be more averse to the prospect which seems to alarm you so much than I am. At the same time, I do not admit that your nephew’s marriage to my daughter, if such a thing were ever to take place, would be a misalliance on his part. We are not, it is true, related to the ducal families which have

the same surname as ours; still we are not low-born people, and——”

“Ah, my dear lady, you shock me!—you distress me! Pray, believe that I have never for one moment presumed, even in thought, to use so insulting a term with reference to you. But consider, I beg of you, that you are English, while we are Austrians—that you are Protestants, while we are Catholics. Consider all the consequences which these distinctions entail!”

“I have considered them, and other formidable objections as well. I can only repeat that I am not in the least ambitious of capturing your nephew. The less so because my late husband’s relations with his father were of a painful nature to me. You will, no doubt, have forgotten them, although I very well recollect meeting you in Vienna many years ago, when Herr von Pardowitz was so kind as to introduce his younger brother to me at a ball.”

Count von Kahlenburg slapped his leg. “Is it possible! Yes, yes; it all comes back to me, and your name—but your name is not a very uncommon one in Great Britain, I believe?—should have sug-

gested more to me than it did. That unfortunate Mr. Hamilton, who was first robbed and then wounded in a duel by my rascally brother! Certainly you must have painful memories of my brother, and although he is dead—or rather because he is dead—I will admit to you that we all knew him to be a rascal. Otto, poor boy, is not a rascal, but your fear lest he should have inherited bad qualities is very pardonable—very pardonable indeed! I am even glad that you should be set against him by that fear.”

The old gentleman was so obviously glad, and for such obvious reasons, that Mrs. Hamilton could not refrain from saying: “I am not as unjust as you make me out; your nephew, I am sure, is an honest man, and I should not have allowed myself to be set against him on account of his parentage, which I did not discover until we had been for some time acquainted with him. Not, that is, on account of his father having been what you have just called him. There were—other considerations which left me no choice but to break with your nephew as soon as I found out who he really was.”

Count von Kahlenburg pursed up his lips and

scrutinised her curiously. "So!—was that story true? Was it Mr. Hamilton who knocked my brother over the edge of the road on the Stelvio Pass and left him there for dead? That was my brother's statement; but he was, to use plain language, such a liar that we attached little importance to it. Moreover, we could only feel thankful to anybody who had enabled us to represent that he was dead; for he was upon the point of being arrested on a charge of forgery, and he could not have escaped conviction. You did not know this?"

"I did not know it at the time, and until the day of his own death my poor husband, whose mind you did not think it necessary to relieve, thought that he had been guilty of manslaughter. Quite recently the truth has come to my ears."

"Now, that is most singular! I had supposed that I was the only person living in possession of a secret which I have not divulged even to my nephew. Who can your informant have been! However, it is a matter of small consequence now. My brother, whom we despatched to South America as soon as he was in a state to travel, succumbed to yellow fever

there shortly after his arrival, and if I have allowed it to be assumed that he perished in Tyrol, that is not because I should have risked anything by proclaiming the facts of the case. The law cannot punish dead men."

"And you are quite sure that he is dead?"

"Absolutely sure; the proofs of his death and burial are in my possession. And if he were not," the old gentleman added, with a slight laugh, "he would not have omitted to present himself in our country long since, for, as my elder brother, he would have been entitled to claim the estates which I now enjoy."

"Well," remarked Mrs. Hamilton, yielding to an irresistible temptation, "he was not dead a few days ago, anyhow."

"My dear lady! what impostor has been deceiving you?"

"You have only to call at 95 Old Burlington Street, in order to ascertain by the evidence of your own senses. But you will not find an impostor there. I recognised Herr von Pardowitz the moment that I saw him, in spite of his white hair, and this at least

I must say for him : he has shown more consideration for my feelings than you have. He had nothing in the world to gain by letting me know that he was alive ; he only remembered what you seem to have forgotten, that the greater part of my life has been spent under a shadow which might have been removed, and he relieved his conscience at some risk—so he says—to his safety. Of course, for your own sake, you will not betray him ; otherwise I should not have told you this.”

Count von Kahlenburg twirled his moustache meditatively, while for a moment his face grew rather long. But presently he recovered himself.

“Impossible !” he exclaimed ; “impossible ! When I tell you that I have documents—stamped, official documents—which testify that my brother died on a certain date and that his interment took place twenty-four hours later !”

“I don’t know whether official documents are always to be relied upon or not,” answered Mrs. Hamilton ; “there must be some official documents, I suppose, to show that your brother died in Tyrol. What I do know is that he was at the address which I have

given you the other day, and there you will probably discover him, if you will call and ask for Herr Weiss."

"I will lose no time in doing that; but I cannot doubt, my dear madam, that you have been imposed upon. Let us now try to fathom this man's motive for imposing upon you. You spoke just now of having broken with my nephew, and indeed I guessed from what he himself told me, that you had inflicted upon him a—a—how do you say *Zurückstoss* in English?"

"A rebuff."

"So!—a rebuff. Well, you gave him perhaps a reason for doing so?"

"Not last summer; but when he followed us to England—of course without any invitation from me and quite against my wish—I was obliged to tell him why I could never consent to my daughter's marriage with a son of Herr von Pardowitz."

"Ah! there we have it! Do you not see that Otto would at once resolve to make away with your reason, if he could? And, as a fact, have you not again consented to receive his visits?"

"I do not see how all the resolution in the world could enable him to resuscitate his father."

"Oh, this Herr Weiss is not his father; I will undertake to convince you very shortly that he is not. But it would not surprise me to find that Herr Weiss is in my nephew's pay."

"You forget that my own eyes and ears have already convinced me that Herr Weiss is Herr von Pardowitz. However, you can't do better than go and judge for yourself. He bound me over to secrecy, I must confess; still, as I say, your recognising him can do no harm, since you won't, for your own sake, betray him."

Count von Kahlenburg, visibly staggered, began to think aloud in his own language. "A forger is always liable to be placed upon his trial for forgery; that cannot be denied, although evidence would be very difficult to obtain after so many years. Yet he would scarcely venture to lay claim to the title and estates. H'm!—h'm!—one might, after all, acquiesce in his incognito, supposing that, by a miracle, he should turn out to be what he represents himself as being. What else is there to be done?"

"There is nothing else to be done," said Mrs. Hamilton, whose knowledge of German had been equal to the following of the above soliloquy; "only I hope you now realise that you are not altogether entitled to look down upon my daughter. Humble as we are, we don't commit forgery in our family."

The old gentleman laughed, good-humouredly enough. "Madam," said he, "I acknowledge the justice of your rebuke. Nevertheless, Otto ought, in my opinion, to marry an Austrian and a lady of his own rank. For the rest, if matters stand as you suppose, I have no authority, and it will be for my elder brother to pronounce judgment."

"You will be glad to hear that he has already pronounced judgment against the marriage. Not that I consider myself in any way subject to his decisions."

"He has pronounced against the marriage!" echoed Count von Kahlenburg, with raised eyebrows. "I wonder why!"

"Well, he maintains that my husband intended to murder him."

"Just what he always maintained. I begin to

doubt—but no! It is too impossible!—too absurd! In any case, I will go and investigate the affair. Meanwhile, my dear lady, may I ask you to take no decisive step until I see you again? My nephew is not, I presume, actually betrothed to your daughter as yet?”

“Certainly not.”

“Good! Then you will not, I feel sure, permit such a betrothal before this mystery is cleared up. For I must still, with all respect to you, believe that you have been tricked.”

“He will not,” mused Mrs. Hamilton, after her visitor had ceremoniously bowed himself out, “be able to maintain that theory. How odd of him not to see that he himself has given the strongest confirmation to the story by confessing that his brother was not killed on the Stelvio! And since it is now admitted that I have been under a false impression all these years, how can I be expected to stand in the way of Daphne’s wishes and happiness? There is the veto of Herr von Pardowitz, of course, but really a man who insists upon being accounted dead must not ask to be treated as though he were still

living. As for this old Count von Kahlenburg, his impertinence would be really amusing, if he hadn't it in his power to disinherit his nephew. How humiliating it is that threats of that kind can't be altogether despised!—and how much more humiliating it would be if we were to despise them and his nephew were to yield to them! Well, I must wait and see what will come of all this; I certainly must not for the present breathe a word to Daphne."

At this moment her ruminations were broken in upon by the throwing open of the door, through which came short, sharp, gasping sounds, as of a stationary underground steam-engine. "Oh," she ejaculated in dismay, under her breath, "here is that pestering, panting Perkins again!"

Mrs. Perkins indeed it was; and Mrs. Perkins, having encountered a grey-headed foreigner on the door-step, was in a state of quite undisguised thirst for information. So lost, in fact, was the good lady to all sense of decorum that even while her right hand was grasping Mrs. Hamilton's, she seized with her left a visiting-card which lay upon the table and,

after examining it, dropped it with a triumphant grunt."

"Didn't I say so!" she exclaimed.

"Didn't you say what?" inquired Mrs. Hamilton querulously.

"Oh, only to myself! You may rely upon me to say nothing to anybody else without your leave. But as I came up the stairs, I did say to myself, 'Well, if that was not our dear Count Otto's uncle I'll eat them both!'"

"I daresay," returned Mrs. Hamilton, provoked beyond endurance, "that you are capable of swallowing your dear Count Otto and his uncle too; you have my full permission to try. But has anybody denied that Count von Kahlenburg is Count von Kahlenburg? And is there any reason why he should not call upon me, if he likes?"

"Dear Mrs. Hamilton, don't be cross with me?" pleaded the fat woman plaintively; "I quite understand that you may have motives for—for clandestine behaviour, and if I only knew what they were, I should very likely sympathise with them; but I can't help wondering—how can I help wondering,

when we are all so fond of you and dear Daphne?—what they are.”

“I cannot imagine what you are talking about,” said Mrs. Hamilton, recovering her self-possession and assuming the nearest resemblance of an awful, cold dignity that she could command. “I have never before, that I can remember, been accused of clandestine conduct, and if it were at all worth while to defend myself against such a charge—but you will probably understand, upon reflection, that I do not feel disposed to do that. We will say no more about the matter, please. I hope your daughters are quite well?”

Not by methods of that kind was Mrs. Perkins to be discouraged. She apologised profusely, but she soon contrived to recur indirectly to the forbidden subject, and if, at the end of a quarter of an hour, she left Palace Gate without having elicited any fresh fact, she had nevertheless, during that time, forced her long-suffering victim to prevaricate palpably.

“I will get to the bottom of it all!” she promised herself. “Very evident it is to me that there are wheels within wheels, and I shouldn’t be surprised

if Mrs. Hamilton were partly in ignorance, though she knows more than she chooses to reveal. But it is useless for her to twist and turn; truth will out!"

Mrs. Hamilton at the same moment was reaching much the same conclusion. "At this rate," she murmured disconsolately, "we might almost as well throw our cards upon the table. Daphne and I, anyhow, have done nothing that we need be ashamed of, and if the von Kahlenburgs are made uncomfortable—well, they shouldn't have relations who forge people's names and get knocked over precipices and pretend to be dead when they aren't dead. With a skeleton like that in the family cupboard, it isn't becoming to turn up one's nose at a match which no English nobleman would consider beneath him."

CHAPTER XVIII.

CONCESSION.

EVERYBODY must have noticed how Fate delights in playing havoc with the law of averages. Mrs. Hamilton might have sat at home every day for a fortnight and never received a visitor, save the usual old women who have nothing to do but to pay calls, nor anything of interest to say when they pay them; but on this particular afternoon, it seemed, there was to be no end of exciting assaults upon the Palace Gate stronghold. Scarcely had Mrs. Perkins retired, baffled but in no wise disheartened, when Count Otto von Kahlenburg stalked in, preceded by an announcement which did not indeed bear much resemblance to his name, but which sufficed to prepare the lady of the house for his entrance.

"If he threatened to do that," Otto proudly declared, "he used a menace to you which I do not believe he would care to address to me. It is not the fear of poverty that would ever cause me to be false to my word or to the lady—the well-born lady—whom I love."

He looked very nice and really quite handsome, as he said that, Mrs. Hamilton thought. She had always liked the young fellow personally, and the reasons which she had had for disliking him in the character of Daphne's lover were fast vanishing. Nevertheless, she said :

"I might be permitted to decline a pauper alliance, though. That is, if it had not already been declined."

"You told him, no doubt, that I had already been refused," observed Otto, dejectedly. "You did not, I suppose, tell him why you had felt compelled to refuse me?"

"Well, yes; I told him that also; I thought he had better know. I met your uncle in Austria, years ago, and he remembered me; although it had not, until I recalled myself to his memory, occurred to him that I could be the same Mrs. Hamilton with

whom he had once danced. And he had not heard—or rather, in spite of his having heard, he had not believed—that my husband was responsible for his brother's fatal accident."

"Had he heard that?" asked Otto wonderingly. "He never told me so."

"I suppose he thought it best to keep you in ignorance of what he has known all along and what I have not known until quite lately—that your father's accident was not a fatal one."

"How?—he has known that all along? He has known all along that the accident was not fatal? You astound me!"

The young man certainly looked astounded, and a shade incredulous into the bargain. "Do you mean that he made this—this amazing announcement to you, or that you made it to him?" he asked presently.

"Well, it was he who amazed me by acknowledging that he had spread a false report of your father's death in order to avert scandal. Afterwards I amazed him by informing him that your father, whom he had supposed to have succumbed to yellow fever in South

America many years ago, was still alive. Perhaps it is hardly fair of me to mention that there were circumstances which rendered your father's disappearance imperative, and that if he had shown himself in Vienna after the accident which was said to have killed him, a great scandal would have been inevitable."

"Oh, I know about the forgery; when I was only a boy my uncle confided to me what he thought I had better hear from him than from anybody else. It was a matter of common knowledge, unfortunately. But I have always believed that my father perished in Tyrol."

"Well, he didn't. Nor in South America either. He is in London at this present moment, and I have seen him. There!—I am sorry for you, and a little sorry for him, and a little for myself. All the same, I don't regret having let the cat out of the bag. Now, at any rate, there is an end of mystery. and we can all act as seems best to us."

Otto broke out into sudden, apparently uncontrollable laughter.

"I beg your pardon," he made haste to say,

sobered by Mrs. Hamilton's air of displeased surprise ; "this is perhaps not altogether a laughing matter, yet it has—do you not see that it has?—a comic side. For example, you must now withdraw the prohibition to which I bowed, and my uncle—at least I presume that he will think so—will be threatened with the loss of his estates."

"Do you call that comic?"

"Just at the first moment. Oh, but it will not become tragic; we cannot allow it to turn to tragedy. My father must vanish again; nothing, after all, is more simple. Naturally, he will not care to risk falling into the hands of the police, and no doubt he will consent, at your request, to retire quietly."

"You are not a very dutiful or affectionate son," remarked Mrs. Hamilton.

He made a deprecating gesture. "I am afraid I cannot pretend to any great love for my father, whom I scarcely remember, and who bequeathed me nothing but a tarnished name; for the estates, which were left to the eldest surviving member of our family, went, on his death, to my uncle. And how can I help being glad that there is no longer any obstacle

between me and one whom I love a thousand times more than I could ever have loved him, even if he had been the best of fathers!"

"You are in far too great a hurry to take that for granted. I am still an obstacle; your uncle is another, and your father, let me tell you, is a third. He will not hear of your marrying the daughter of the man who, as he chooses to maintain, tried to murder him."

"Indeed? But why should he be allowed to permit or forbid anything? He has no authority, no power. It seems to me rather like a piece of impertinence on his part to presume to dictate to you."

"Perhaps it also seems like that to me; but I dare say it will not seem so to your uncle. And your uncle, remember, has both authority and power."

"No more than you may be pleased to allow him, dear Mrs. Hamilton. He can disinherit me, it is true; but, as I have told you, I am not to be scared by such threats. I do not think either that he will carry them out, if we are firm with him."

"In other words, you expect me to set him at defiance in order to please you?"

"Ah, not in order to please me! But for Daphne's sake—for your daughter's sake! Nobody can know better than I do how unworthy I am of her love; yet—she does love me, Mrs. Hamilton."

Mrs. Hamilton sighed. "Yes—well—that is so, I suppose. It is not what I should have chosen, but I won't deny that I was making up my mind to give in when your uncle arrived. What is to be done now I can't think; but, at any rate, you should go and see your father, whose address I will give you. He doesn't, unfortunately, wish to see you——"

"Nor do I wish to see him," interpolated Otto, with decision.

"You are so odd, both of you! But although you have no desire to see him, and although he forbade me to mention him to you, I certainly think you ought to meet. Your father's sanction, if we can obtain it, must have some influence with your uncle—especially if all claims to the title and property are waived. The best plan, perhaps, will be for you to come with me to Old Burlington Street, where your father is staying, and talk matters over. I will make an appointment with your father for five o'clock

to-morrow evening. By that time he will have seen your uncle, and very likely some rather disagreeable things will have been said to him, and he may not feel inclined to take your uncle's side. Do you see?"

"You think he will have met my uncle by that time?"

"It is not at all improbable that he has met your uncle by this time. Anyhow, I feel sure that Count von Kahlenburg went straight to Old Burlington Street, after leaving me."

The young man nodded meditatively. "But I doubt," said he, after a pause, "whether it would be wise for me to accompany you to-morrow. I think we should have more chance of success if you were to make the appointment that you speak of and keep it alone. Afterwards, if my father should consent to receive me, I will, of course, obey any summons that may reach me from him; only he cannot take it amiss that I hesitate to begin by disobeying his express orders. Whatever may come of all this, he is bound to disappear once more; so there would be no object in our meeting, would there? What, by the way, was his object in reappearing?"

Mrs. Hamilton explained. "To give the man his due, he has behaved in a very disinterested manner, and has shown a good deal more consideration for me than your uncle has. Though, to be sure, neither he nor your uncle could foresee that my poor Daphne would ever lose her heart to you. Perhaps you are right about my going there without you—at any rate, in the first instance. When I have got him, as I believe I shall, to consent to the marriage, we can discuss further arrangements. He does not want money, I understand; otherwise your uncle would surely see the necessity of providing for him. In any case, your uncle must see that I shall not, after all that has taken place, approach him as a suppliant, and I should think he must also recognise that if I no longer oppose you and Daphne, it hardly becomes him to do so!"

Otto seized Mrs. Hamilton's hand and kissed it with enthusiasm. "From the moment that you no longer oppose us there is nothing to be feared!" he triumphantly cried.

CHAPTER XIX.

SUBTLETY.

A PENSIVE and puzzled man was Count Von Kahlenburg as he shaped a course for Old Burlington Street. He had undertaken to prove to Mrs. Hamilton that the so-called von Pardowitz was an impostor, and he himself hardly saw how the man could be anything else; yet reflection was productive of misgiving rather than confidence. The theory that Otto had suborned somebody to personate his late father seemed, upon consideration, a little far-fetched; Otto was not, after all, a born fool, and it was difficult to believe that he would have thus placed himself for the remainder of his days at the mercy of an unscrupulous agent. If, on the other hand, Herr Weiss was not in Otto's employ, what imaginable motive could he have had for imposing upon a lady who in such a matter would not, it might be assumed,

be over readily deceived? She professed, furthermore, to have recognised him. Improbability for improbability, the chances looked slightly in favour of Count von Kahlenburg's elder brother being yet alive, and most unpleasant it was, on every ground, to be forced to such a conclusion.

"Well, well!" muttered that brisk and quick-witted old gentleman, as he signalled to a passing hansom, "it is a waste of time to form conjectures when certainty is within reach. Mrs. Hamilton may have been deceived; but it would take a very clever man indeed to deceive me as to the identity of my own brother. Herr Weiss, one of us two is about to have a bad quarter of an hour!"

That prediction would doubtless have been a safe one to make, if only Herr Weiss had been at home; but he was not. Literally not at home, the housemaid declared, in response to sceptical persistency, nor had he been in the house for two days past. She really could not say when he would be back; perhaps in an hour, perhaps not for a week. He was a singular gentleman, and there was never any dependence upon him, as you might say; but he paid his

rent regular, gave no trouble, took all his meals outdoors, and was apt to bite a person's nose off when questioned. Any card or message should be delivered to him as soon as ever he returned.

Count von Kahlenburg prudently refrained from intrusting the grimy janitress with either. He likewise deemed it prudent to request that she would not mention the fact of his having called to Herr Weiss, and, by way of neglecting no precaution, he handed her half-a-crown, which she swiftly pocketed. "I shall be here again to-morrow morning," he added, "and I hope I may then be more fortunate."

"Well, sir, I'm sure I 'ope so," returned the recipient of his guerdon cheerfully; "though I shouldn't venture for to promise it—not if you was to offer me a golden suvrin'!"

The old gentleman walked away, somewhat annoyed and disappointed. In his own country he was a magnate, and when he wanted to see people he could always make sure of seeing them; in his own country, moreover, there was an admirably organised police service, capable of supplying information at a moment's notice with regard to any

given individual. But in this vast, chaotic London there was no laying your hand even upon notorious anarchists, much less upon a quiet German lodger, whom nothing forbade to flit eccentrically to and fro, or to ensconce himself behind locked doors.

"This craze for personal liberty," mused Count von Kahlenburg, "is the curse of Anglo-Saxon populations! What could be more absurd than that I should be reduced in this way to await Herr Weiss's good pleasure? And what step, I wonder, had I better take next?"

The next step that he took, in a literal sense (for he was frowningly scrutinising the pavement, without regard to passers-by), landed him full tilt against a pedestrian, to whom, as in duty bound, he lifted his hat, with suitable apologies.

"Oh, don't mind me, *Herr Graf*," answered the other, laughing; "I am too glad to see you in England to quarrel with you for knocking me into the gutter."

The Count threw up his hands. "My dear Clough! I am delighted—enchanted; I should already have endeavoured to find you; but I am only in London

since this morning, and my first visit was—you may guess for whom!”

“For your nephew, I presume.”

“*Gott bewahre!* Otto has my quick temper, with a little of his father’s perversity; I do not wish to spoil everything by provoking him into open defiance. No; it is with your friend Mrs. Hamilton that I have been holding an interesting conversation—a conversation only too interesting and unforeseen, I am sorry to say!”

“In consequence of which, perhaps,” observed Jack, “you have been visiting someone else in this neighbourhood?”

“Precisely so. I should say rather that I have been making an unsuccessful attempt to visit him; for it appears that he is seldom at home. Mrs. Hamilton has told you her incredible story then? Why did you not mention it when you wrote to me?”

“Well, I had not at that time been let into the secret. It begins to dawn upon me that I did a rather foolish thing when I wrote to you.”

“My dear Clough, you did a very kind and friendly thing; my only regret was that I was prevented by

engagements which I could not neglect from acting more promptly upon your information. I perceived, of course, that correspondence would be worse than useless, and I resolved to address a personal petition to Mrs. Hamilton at the earliest possible moment. Now I arrive, only to discover what I had never suspected, that she is the widow of the Mr. Hamilton between whom and my brother a passage of arms took place long ago; and, as if that were not enough—it would have been enough, she declares, to make her reject Otto—I am assured that my brother is still in the flesh and in London! Of that I believe not one word; she has been deluded, hoaxed—eh? What is your opinion?”

“I am afraid,” answered Jack, slowly, “that you won’t much like my opinion; but I will give it you, if you don’t mind walking as far as my rooms with me. Then we can talk the whole business over quietly.”

Count von Kahlenburg hooked his arm within that of his English friend. “I ask nothing better!” he cried.

Mrs. Perkins, waddling homewards through the

murky mist of the winter evening, descried these two earnestly conversing gentlemen, as they passed beneath a gas-lamp, and had much ado to restrain herself from accosting one of them. She would certainly have done so, had she not been a little in awe of him, and had she not known by experience that she would get nothing out of him, even though she should go down on her knees in the mud and adjure him to deliver her from the agony of curiosity by which she was devoured. As it was, she merely took a mental note, while Jack stalked on, serenely unconscious of her vicinity.

Between Old Burlington Street and St. James's Place Count von Kahlenburg had time to give an account of his interview with Mrs. Hamilton, and to relate quite candidly the history of his disreputable and (as he still hoped) defunct brother. He was only once interrupted by an inquiry as to whether he had seen Miss Hamilton, to which he replied that he had not had that privilege; but on reaching Captain Clough's rooms, where an armchair and cigar awaited him, he was not a little surprised to hear his host say:

"Well, it's very evident that you'll have to give in, and you may as well give in with a good grace."

"Give in!—why should I give in?" he not unnaturally asked.

"Oh, for several good reasons; one of which is that Mrs. Hamilton means to give in. She can't do otherwise, now that she knows for certain that her husband was guilty neither of murder nor manslaughter. Whether Herr Weiss is Herr von Pardowitz or not ceases to be a question of any importance, don't you see? You yourself have obligingly released her from all her scruples."

"Her scruples did her honour; but they are no concern of mine. Am I to permit an unsuitable marriage to take place because this good lady does not recognise its unsuitability?"

"Not on that account, perhaps; but there are other reasons. The best of them is that you must. Otto won't, after this, play her false at your bidding, and, whatever you may choose to threaten, you won't quarrel with your natural heir for keeping his pledged word. Moreover, the match can't really be called unsuitable, if it is not magnificent. Mrs. Hamilton, as

you must have seen for yourself, is quite a lady, and in Miss Hamilton you will have one of the most charming, not to say the most beautiful, nieces in Europe."

"Clough, I did not expect this of you! If you are Otto's advocate, why in the name of Heaven did you write to warn me of what he was doing?"

"Well—because I had a very strong idea that my writing would bring you to London," answered Jack, smilingly. "And I made no mistake there, you see."

"You said, a few minutes ago, that you had been foolish to write to me."

"I thought so for a moment, after hearing of your rather ill-advised visit to Old Burlington Street; but I don't think so now. Old Burlington Street and Herr Weiss needn't count—they don't count—and what I foresaw will come about even more smoothly than I dared to anticipate."

"Is it permitted to inquire what you foresaw?" asked Count von Kahlenburg, with ominous calmness and dawning suspicion.

"Yes; and I don't mind telling you, and you must

quarrel with me, if you insist upon quarrelling. But I hope you won't. I foresaw that you would be much more formidable at a distance than on the spot. I foresaw that you would say things through the post which would make it extremely difficult for a self-respecting lady to hold out against you, but that you would never have the cruelty or the bad manners to say such things to Miss Daphne, whom I counted upon, and still count upon, to make a conquest of you. I foresaw, in short——"

"*Donnerwetter!*—a carefully contrived plot, then?"

"Just so; but a very innocent one. Its success will have to be its excuse."

"I will excuse you, sir," cried Count von Kahlenburg, getting up and throwing his cigar into the fire, "when it succeeds, and not before!"

"At that rate, I shall not have to wait long. You could resist Mrs. Hamilton, I have no doubt, and you might—from a distance—manage to resist Otto; but resisting Daphne will be too hard a nut for you to crack. Have you ever in your life been able to resist beauty in distress?"

"Captain Clough, you do not know me. I may be

susceptible—I do not deny it, and I am not ashamed of it—to female blandishments ; but they have never caused me to forget my duty to my family, and they never will.”

“ They may cause you to see it in another light, though. Well, at any rate, your duty to your family doesn’t compel you to return to Old Burlington Street, and if I were you, I wouldn’t.”

“ But it is indispensable that I should return there ! This man may be telling the truth ; he may actually be my brother.”

“ I thought you were convinced that he was an impostor. But whether he is the one or the other, he has become an irrelevant factor in the affair and he will have to be kept out of sight. By far the best way of treating him is to take no notice of him.”

The old gentleman picked up his hat and moved towards the door.

“ Captain Clough,” said he, “ I am possibly wrong, but I have a notion that you know more about this man than you choose to tell. Until I know more about him I shall take leave to maintain a doubt of which you cannot complain. For, by your own

confession, you have not dealt straightforwardly with me in this matter."

Thereupon he retired, with a great deal of dignity, leaving Jack to shrug his shoulders and mutter philosophically, "Well, there won't be much harm done if he does return to Old Burlington Street, for he is pretty sure to be refused admittance."

CHAPTER XX.

TACT.

"AT my age," mused Count von Kahlenburg, while he put the finishing touches to a careful toilet before the looking-glass on the following morning, "a man is not astonished by treachery; there are many more traitors than honest people in this ill-behaved little world. But at least it is reasonable to pre-suppose motives, and where the devil is Clough's motive? Where, I ask you," he repeated, apostrophising an impudent London sparrow, who perched at that moment on the black window-sill, "is Clough's motive?"

The sparrow expressed complete ignorance and indifference by ruffling up his dirty feathers, hopping to and fro, laying his head on one side and staring for a moment at his questioner in an indescribably vulgar manner; after which he took to flight.

"For," resumed the Count, "to pretend that he has none, beyond a misplaced benevolence, is nothing

short of an insult to my understanding. No; there is some mystery here which requires to be cleared up; and cleared up it shall be, if I have to invade that man's rooms and occupy them until he returns."

But this, of course, was only a way of speaking. He could not literally carry out that project of invasion, determined though he was to unearth the self-styled Herr Weiss, nor did he attempt to do so when, an hour later, he was once more refused admittance at 95 Old Burlington Street. Something, however, in the manner of the housemaid, who declared that the mysterious lodger was not within, led him to take a sovereign out of his waistcoat pocket and hold it meditatively between his finger and thumb.

"My good girl," said he, "I intend to see Herr Weiss, and if I were to see him now, that would be a convenience to me for which I should be willing to pay."

The woman eyed the proffered bribe hungrily and regretfully.

"'Tain't no manner o' use, sir," she sighed; "he ain't in the 'ouse, and that's Gospel truth."

"But perhaps he has been in the house since I saw you last," persisted her tempter insidiously; "perhaps you know when he will be in the house again."

"Well, you see, sir, his horders, when he looked in for a moment this morning, was very strict, and I didn't ought to disobey them. 'Tea at five o'clock,' he says, 'and don't you let nobody in, except you know who,' he says; 'because I shouldn't wonder if somebody was to call and arst for me during the day,' he says. And I'm an honest woman, sir, if I *am* pore and 'ard-worked."

"I saw at a glance that you were all three. Oblige me by accepting—indeed, no! you have nothing to thank me for; it is I who am indebted to you, or rather who shall be. So much so that it will give me great pleasure to double this small donation at five o'clock. You are quite sure, I presume, that Herr Weiss is not in his rooms at the present moment?"

The vanquished slavey laid a black hand upon a heart which, it may be hoped, deserved no such adjective, and swore that he was not. "Nor won't be till he comes in for his tea, you may depend. And

I do 'ope, sir, you don't mean no 'arm to the pore gentleman; for if I thought as you did, it wouldn't be two pounds, nor yet five pounds, as would ever indooce me——"

"I am quite sure that it wouldn't, and quite sure that you cannot have fallen into the absurd error of mistaking me for an agent of police."

The woman hastened to protest that she knew a gentleman when she saw one.

"Precisely so; I expected nothing less of your evidently quick intelligence. I perceived at once that you were an estimable person; you do me the honour to recognise that I am the same; it is enough! Rest assured that I have no evil designs upon Herr Weiss; on the contrary, it may be that I am about to render him a service. Still, there are good reasons why he must not know that I have been here or that I propose to return. You will, therefore, be so kind as not to mention that I have inquired for him. By the way, who is to be his guest at tea? You said just now, I think, that there was some particular person whom you were instructed to admit."

"I reely couldn't tell you, sir—not for certain.

It might be a lady, or it might be a gentleman. Or then again, it might be both."

"My good friend Mrs. Hamilton, or my good friend Clough, or both," mused the Count; "this becomes more and more interesting!" But aloud he only said: "Well, no matter! I count, then, upon your discretion, and you may count upon my fulfilling my part in our innocent little bargain."

He then marched off, wondering what he had better do with himself until the evening. One thing, at any rate, it was certain that he had better not do, and that was to encounter his nephew. Explanations with Otto were, on every ground, to be deprecated and deferred. Still, one cannot, when one is a hale, elderly gentleman of fixed habits (including the Continental one of making the midday meal at midday) sit indoors till after dark, and this was really Count von Kahlenburg's only reason for having himself driven to Palace Gate before three o'clock in the afternoon. He had nothing fresh to say to Mrs. Hamilton, nor could he expect to hear anything fresh from her; but time must be killed somehow, and no harm would be done by incidentally discovering

whether she had an appointment with his so-called brother for that evening or not.

On being informed that Mrs. Hamilton had just gone out, it occurred to him to ask for Miss Hamilton. "Let us see this young enchantress, if she is visible," thought he. "It will puzzle her to enchant me, whatever the eccentric Clough may imagine; but one may presume that she is at least pretty, and a pretty face is always an agreeable object to contemplate during spare moments."

Miss Hamilton, it appeared, was at home, and the face upon which Count von Kahlenburg was privileged to gaze when, after a short delay, he was ushered into her presence, more than justified his most sanguine anticipations. Daphne was not only pretty, she was absolutely beautiful; also she was dressed in perfect taste, her boots fitted her admirably, her hands were those of a lady, and she had an unmistakable air of distinction. All this the old gentleman perceived and acknowledged in as short a time as it took him to introduce himself; nor—such was his irrepressible gallantry—could he refrain from exclaiming:

"My dear young lady, I have seen you and—all is said. No room remains for surprise; although, unhappily, I am now more than ever the prey of regret."

The recipient of this graceful compliment did not look particularly grateful for it. She pointed to a chair, seated herself, and remarked: "I think you will find that there is nothing to regret. I am afraid, from what you say, that you must have come to London to forbid something which does not need to be forbidden, because there is no question of its ever happening. Is that so?"

The Count threw up protesting hands. "Oh, to forbid—no. It would not be judicious to employ that rough word, since I cannot command obedience. But to expostulate—to deprecate—alas, yes! It was my deplorable duty, as your mother will have told you, to point out to her, when she did me the honour to receive me yesterday——"

"My mother has told me nothing," broke in Daphne, wonderingly; "I had no idea that she had seen you yesterday."

"Indeed! Yet I did not suggest that she should conceal anything from you. I do not, it is true, wish

my nephew to know that I am in this country ; for argument would only make him more obstinate. I myself, I confess, should be obstinate if I were his age, and if I had been so fortunate and so unfortunate as to win what he has won. But to you, Miss Hamilton, who are certainly as sensible as you are—permit an old man to say it—lovely, a few words of reason and prudence may be addressed.”

“Not unless they are required, though,” returned Daphne, who was getting a little tired of these flowers of speech ; “and really they are not required. I don’t know how you can possibly tell that I am sensible ; but I believe I am, and even if I were not, I should refuse to marry your nephew. I have already refused, for reasons of my own, which have nothing to do with yours. Your objection to us, I suppose, is that we are not your equals in rank.”

That was indeed Count von Kahlenburg’s principal objection ; though he did not like to hear it so crudely formulated. Rank, he observed, was a term differently understood in different countries ; broadly speaking, no man could be more than a gentleman, nor could any woman be more than a lady. Inter-

national marriages must, however, always be regarded as a hazardous experiment; especially so when the contracting parties were not of the same creed.

"I should not be afraid of the experiment," Daphne frankly avowed; "I don't think I should hesitate much about adopting my husband's creed either, if he wished me to do so. It wouldn't really be a change of creed, only a change of form. But your nephew will never be my husband, so it doesn't matter."

"Why," inquired Count von Kahlenburg, "do you speak so positively?"

"I don't think I am quite at liberty to tell you more than that I have invincible reasons. I don't at all mind your knowing that I would marry him if I could, and that I shall never marry anybody else; but I must not make my mother miserable. It so happens that she is quite as much against our marriage as you can be—and on what seem to me much better grounds."

The old gentleman nodded meditatively. It was plain that the girl knew nothing about Herr Weiss, while she could not, of course, know what her mother had only heard on the previous afternoon, that, be

Herr Weiss who he might, the late Mr. Hamilton had slain nobody. Ought he to enlighten her? He was still debating this point of casuistry when she resumed cheerfully :

"Now, you see, I hope, that, as I began by telling you, there is nothing to regret."

"Ah, my dear young lady, it was I who began by telling you—most truly—that I am full of regret!"

She laughed, showing the most perfectly white and regular teeth that an appreciative connoisseur of female beauty could desire to behold. "But why?" she asked.

"Because," he would fain have replied, "you are such an extremely fine specimen of your race; because you would look so splendid in the family diamonds; because, after all, I believe you are as well-bred as there is any need for you to be; because I admire and respect your unselfishness; because, finally, there is something about your manner and fearless directness of speech which convinces me that it would not take a great deal to make us the best of friends."

But, as he was upwards of sixty years of age, he

did not say anything quite as pronounced as that. He limited himself to a few more compliments, and presently—having no excuse for prolonging his visit—rose. “Pray,” said he, “make my respectful compliments to Mrs. Hamilton, whom I am sorry to have missed. She will not, I suppose, be returning home just yet?”

“Not before five o'clock, I am afraid,” answered Daphne; “she is almost always in at that time.”

He could scarcely propose to await Mrs. Hamilton's return for a matter of two hours. Besides, it seemed possible that, on this particular evening, she had an appointment for five o'clock elsewhere. That remained to be discovered; and, meanwhile, he in no wise committed himself by expressing a polite hope that he might be permitted to renew an acquaintance which he would not willingly relinquish. He retired in the self-complacent belief that he had extricated himself from this rather delicate situation with a good deal of tact. He likewise reflected that, if the worst should come to the worst—as it very probably would—Otto would at least be able to boast of possessing the handsomest wife in Austria. As for her

being irresistible, that was an exaggeration on Clough's part. Irresistible she was not, although her ready surrender had rendered the task of resisting her a little more difficult than it might otherwise have been ; but she was unquestionably attractive, and nobody could quarrel with Otto's taste.

It cannot be said that Count von Kahlenburg left behind him quite as agreeable an impression as he carried away. Daphne, as soon as he was gone, shrugged her shoulders and drew down the corners of her mouth.

"I suppose," thought she, "he was not the least conscious of being impertinent ; I suppose he was only too glad to be rid of a threatened misalliance upon any terms. Still, it seems odd that he shouldn't have shown just a little bit of natural curiosity. Well, I am thankful that I have a mother. Because, if the matter had been one for my own decision, I doubt whether I should have felt bound to give up everything and spoil my whole life in order to earn his benevolent approval."

CHAPTER XXI.

MOTHER-WIT.

MRS. HAMILTON, returning home, shortly before four o'clock, was surprised to find Daphne still seated idly in the darkening drawing-room.

"My dear child," she exclaimed, "what are you doing?"

"Nothing," answered the girl.

"But it is so unlike you to be doing nothing! Has anything happened to distress you? Has—has anybody been here?"

"Count von Kahlenburg has been here," Daphne replied. "He wasn't exactly distressing, but the effect of him has been a trifle depressing; there seemed to be no special necessity for that addition to one's small annoyances. Why didn't you tell me that he was in England, mother?"

"Oh, the *old* Count, you mean!—*he* has been here

again, has he?" cried Mrs. Hamilton, in some consternation. "I didn't mention his having turned up yesterday because—well, because, as you say, it seemed unnecessary to add to your worries. What brought him back so soon?—and why in the world did he force himself upon you? I don't think it is quite fair of him to behave like this."

"He didn't behave very badly," said Daphne; "he was overflowing with urbanity and qualified flattery. Only he couldn't neglect such a good opportunity of letting me know by word of mouth how much he would hate to be related by marriage to an untitled English heretic."

"Oh, was that all?" murmured Mrs. Hamilton, with evident relief.

"Wasn't that enough? I was wondering whether it had not been a trifle too much, and whether I had not let him off rather too easily when I assured him that the danger was an imaginary one. After all, it is not the best of good manners to tell any woman to her face that she is an inferior being."

"It is horribly rude," Mrs. Hamilton agreed; "besides being, in the present instance, quite untrue."

I do not for one moment admit, and I never have admitted, that we are socially beneath these von Kahlenburgs. Still, he might have been even more objectionable, and I wonder that he wasn't. I wonder whether he didn't come here with the intention of being more objectionable."

"I'm sure I don't know," answered Daphne. "Perhaps it wasn't in his power to be more so."

"Perhaps not; and yet—he must have found out something since I saw him last. He asked for me in the first instance, I suppose?"

"Yes; I believe so. I was to give you his respectful compliments and say how sorry he was to have missed you."

"Nothing more than that? He had no information to give you about—about his nephew, or about—anybody else?"

"Not a word. All he had to say was that he hoped I didn't really mean to marry his nephew, and all I had to say was that, for reasons of my own, I didn't. What information did you expect him to give me, mother? For it is very plain that you are hiding something from me."

"Mrs. Hamilton heaved a sigh. "I have acted for the best," she declared. "Goodness knows I would rather have told you from the first all that there was to tell; but things have been so complicated, and until the other day I always had a lingering hope that the knot of the difficulty might be cut by your accepting Jack Clough—who is infinitely more desirable than your Otto, if you could but see it!"

"But, mother dear," objected Daphne, laughing, "as I can't see it—and as I am sure that, at the bottom of his heart, he is thankful to me for not seeing it."

"Oh, he isn't thankful; he is only infuriatingly modest and stupid and useless! However, I have done with him; he doesn't count any longer, poor fellow! And although I still wish with all my heart that you had never met young von Kahlenburg, I think you ought to know now that I don't feel quite as I did about him."

"Ah, but you do, mother! I know you are willing, for my sake, to pretend that you don't; but it isn't in reality possible for you to have changed your

mind, and mine is quite made up. I must not, and I won't, marry his father's son."

"Not even with his father's consent?"

"Well, that can't be had."

"I am not sure that it can't; I shall have to do what I can to extort it from him presently, anyhow. What I have been hiding from you all this time—I honestly thought the best plan was to hide it until matters developed themselves more—is that his father is alive and well."

"Mother!—are you serious?"

"Absolutely serious, and so is he; though Count von Kahlenburg affects to believe that I have been made the victim of a practical joke. Naturally, Count von Kahlenburg doesn't wish to believe that his brother survives; yet he himself partly confirms his brother's story. He admits, at all events, that Herr von Pardowitz survived the accident that you know of, and that, of course, is enough—from his nephew's point of view and yours."

Mrs. Hamilton then gave a rapid, succinct account of her negotiations with the lodger of Old Burlington Street, and remarked, in conclusion: "It is perhaps

just as well that this high and mighty old Count has arrived upon the scene now. After all, his brother, even if he is a forger, could make things rather unpleasant for him, I suppose, in the last resort by setting up a claim to the estates, and I don't see how he can very well refuse the man some moral authority in the question of Count Otto's marriage."

"But you say that Otto's father won't hear of the marriage," objected Daphne.

"Well, I fancy that he might be prevailed upon to take up a different tone. You see, he can't, in the nature of things, be over and above fond of the younger brother who has stepped into his shoes and who doesn't seem to have shown any great natural affection for him. Added to which, if he is the man he formerly was—and I don't notice much change in him—he will take a sincere, malicious delight in spiting somebody. What has probably happened is that the brothers met last night and promptly fell out; that would account for old von Kahlenburg's having sought you out in such a hurry. His idea, no doubt, would be to offend your pride to such an ex-

tent that you would save him all further trouble by renouncing his nephew for good and all."

"If that was his idea, he failed. I am proud enough to think that if Otto considers me his equal, I can afford to disregard anybody else's opinion upon the subject."

"So am I," said Mrs. Hamilton. "If it came to that, I should be prepared to tell Count von Kahlenburg that his consent could be dispensed with. Still, there is no denying that it would be very much more satisfactory on every ground to secure his consent, and I imagine that, with a little management, it may be secured. Just at the present moment his main object, we may be sure, is to get this troublesome brother of his quietly out of the way again; and why shouldn't his brother drive him into a corner by saying, 'Very well, then; I will vanish. But only upon the condition that you welcome Miss Hamilton as your future niece, and that you do not attempt to deprive my son of his rights.'"

"Would he be in the least likely to say anything of the sort?"

"Well, that remains to be seen. I daresay he might

if he thought he could make himself tolerably unpleasant all round by doing so. You must remember that I have represented myself to him from the first as being strongly against the marriage."

"Mother, dear, do you know that you have been talking as if you were not at all against it now?"

Mrs. Hamilton made a little grimace. "As if I hadn't been talking like that ever since I was deprived of my last excuse for being against it! I don't say that I shouldn't have very much preferred an Englishman; but one of the drawbacks of being an Englishwoman is that one can't make matrimonial arrangements on behalf of one's children. One has to accept what comes, so long as it isn't downright outrageous, and the young man, to do him justice, is not that."

Daphne reflected for a few minutes. "I had quite decided to think no more about it, you know," she said apologetically at length.

"Oh, my dear child, you have been admirable throughout! But, after what I have told you, it would be impossible for you to persist in being admirable at the price of appearing faithless. To

conceal nothing, I may as well add that Count Otto knows all. He called yesterday, and I laid the whole situation bare to him, with the result that I promised to make an appointment with his father for this evening. When he calls again to-morrow, as, of course, he will, it will be your turn to welcome him with good news."

"But is it certain that there will be any good news?"

"It is certain that you will engage yourself to become his wife, with or without the old gentleman's sanction, and I take it that he will call that good news."

"We can do very well without the old gentleman's sanction, if only we have yours," Daphne declared.

"Oh, our self-respect compels us to insist upon doing without it. Nevertheless, you will be quite ridiculously poor, if he holds out, and I doubt whether you are the sort of people to enjoy poverty. I wonder——"

"What do you wonder, mother?"

"I was only wondering whether it wouldn't be rather a good plan for you to come with me to Old Burlington Street and be introduced to your future

father-in-law. You won't like him; but he might like you, and he certainly doesn't like me. It is just a chance shot; we shall be no worse off if it misses. Yes! put on your hat and we will go."

Daphne looked a little reluctant. "What can I say to him?" she asked.

"You need not say much; your cue will be to look mournful and rather imploring. Naturally I am not going to beg for his blessing; that would be a very sure way of earning the reverse. But it is an established fact that the man has some sort of a conscience; otherwise he would never have made himself known to me at all. Now, if he can be persuaded that he is doing a kindly act and at the same time thwarting both me and his brother, he will have all the joy of killing three birds with one stone, don't you see?"

"I never gave you credit for being so crafty, mother!" exclaimed Daphne, laughing.

"My dear, I am a hen with one chicken. Every hawk in the world knows what that implies. Allow your poor mother to have some small supply of mother-wit."

CHAPTER XXII.

ELUCIDATION.

NO patient student of human character can have failed to notice that, whereas men are generally very well satisfied with getting their own way, a woman scarcely cares about gaining hers, unless she has accomplished this by means of something in the nature of strategy. It may further have been observed that, if she be but permitted or encouraged to employ strategic methods, she will quite cheerfully set to work to achieve ends for which she has little personal predilection. Mrs. Hamilton, who was far from coveting an Austrian alliance, and had grave doubts as to whether Daphne's ultimate happiness would be promoted thereby, set forth for Old Burlington Street with a light heart and with stimulating anticipations of the encounter which awaited her

there. She was not, perhaps, about to obtain her heart's desire ; but she flattered herself that she was at least going to score. And this conviction was not lessened by the undisguised displeasure of Herr von Pardowitz when she favoured him with an introduction to her companion. He started, grunted, fell back, and said in a very surly tone of voice :

" This is a breach of our compact, madam ; I did not bargain for a visit from your daughter."

" I don't remember entering into any compact with you," Mrs. Hamilton coolly rejoined. " I wished my daughter to see you, lest she should fancy, as other people have fancied, that you were a figment of my imagination. My daughter, I need scarcely tell you, attaches a good deal of importance to the fact of your being a living man. Her idea is that nothing short of your death at the time when you were supposed to have died ought to stand between her and your son."

" You have brought her here, then, because that is your own idea, as well as hers ?"

" Not at all ! I have brought her here because that seemed to me the most straightforward course

to pursue, and because I am just as disinclined to welcome your son as you are to welcome her. You have already told me—rather rudely and rather absurdly, I must say; still you have told me—that you forbid the banns. I shall be much obliged if you will repeat that statement in her presence.”

“Madam,” growled out Herr von Pardowitz, who had thrown himself down into an armchair in a corner of the ill-lighted room, without so much as inviting his visitors to be seated, “I have nothing to say to your daughter; if she will not obey you, why should she obey me? But I have something to say to you. By your own admission, you have betrayed me, and have mentioned my being in London to other people, who, according to you, have doubted the truth of your statement. Permit me to inquire who those other people are.”

Mrs. Hamilton took a chair. “I am sure you know by this time,” she answered, “who one of them is. You have certainly seen your brother, and I don’t think you can fairly blame me for having given him your address. I knew he would not hand you over to the police, and I wanted him to know that the

marriage which he came to England in such a hurry to prevent was not at all likely to take place. Of course it is no longer an absolute impossibility, since my husband's innocence is now proved; but I am not ambitious of being connected with a forger's son, and you, I believe, object strongly to any connection with the daughter of one whom you still choose to regard as your would-be murderer. You have said as much to your brother, no doubt."

"My brother! Am I to understand that my brother is in London and that you have given information to him?"

"He has not been here yet, then?"

Herr von Pardowitz shook his head vehemently. "He may have been here; I am seldom at home, and never at home to those who call without a previous appointment. Assuredly I shall never be at home to my brother. Mrs. Hamilton, you have been guilty of an unpardonable breach of trust; you make me regret my good nature in having revealed myself to you."

"Well, as it happens, I should have found out all that I cared to know without your help," returned

Mrs. Hamilton impenitently. "Your brother told me that you had not been killed on the Stelvio, and whether you were yet alive or whether you had died long ago in South America, as he asserted, made no great difference to me. Of course I told him that you were here; why shouldn't I? He can't hurt you, and you will do him, as well as me, a favour by formally forbidding your son to marry my daughter."

"I am not eager to do a favour to either of you," said Herr von Pardowitz; "I am surprised that you, Mrs. Hamilton, should expect any further favours from me under the circumstances. Your daughter, who remains discreetly mute, might, I think, ask something of me with a better grace than you can assume."

Daphne broke silence for the first time by asking, "Would there be any use in my making a request?"

Herr von Pardowitz did not immediately reply; but, after a pause, he brusquely resumed: "In a word, Mrs. Hamilton, you invite me to associate myself with you and my brother for the purpose of

opposing two persons with whom I have no quarrel. I must respectfully decline. I care nothing about any of you; I am leaving London to-night, and it is as certain as anything in this world can be that not one of you will ever set eyes upon me again; but, if I must needs please somebody, I prefer my son to my brother and your daughter to yourself. So far as I am concerned, the banns may be published to-morrow. I withdraw my interdict."

This was an even more speedy success than Mrs. Hamilton had hoped for; but, of course, she was careful to disguise her satisfaction. "You are very disappointing and rather spiteful," she sighed.

"If I am spiteful," he rejoined, "it is because I am disappointed. You have rewarded me by betraying me; you cannot wonder at my refusing to lend myself to your schemes. I think also that I should be still more spiteful if I were to take vengeance upon this young lady, who has never injured me, and to side with you against my son, who, for anything I know to the contrary, may be an estimable member of society. Let them marry; they have my consent."

An animated contest ensued, in which Mrs. Hamilton got the worst of it without too palpably displaying her willingness to be worsted. But what disconcerted her a little was Herr von Pardowitz's obstinate refusal to make his change of views known either to Count von Kahlenburg or to Count Otto.

"I will not receive them," he firmly declared; "I do not wish to see them, nor can any good purpose be served by their seeing me. You can repeat to them—and if you do not, I am sure Miss Hamilton will—what I have said. That must suffice."

"It will not suffice for your brother," Mrs. Hamilton returned. "He does not believe in you; he maintains that you are a swindler."

Herr von Pardowitz shrugged his shoulders. "He is very welcome to that theory; although I do not see why a man who demands nothing should be called a swindler. For the rest, I am not anxious to convince him of my identity. For the reasons that you know of, I was anxious to convince you; but it seems that that anxiety also was superfluous."

"Well, so it has turned out. At the same time," continued Mrs. Hamilton, with an air of one who

desires to give the devil his due, "I feel that you deserve some credit for having meant kindly. It almost sounds, too, from the way in which you speak, as if you wished to do a kindness to your son and my daughter."

Herr von Pardowitz made a gesture of assent. "If my way of speaking sounded not only almost but altogether like that," said he, smiling, "it would not misrepresent me. I am glad to be able to serve them at so small an expense to myself."

"And not sorry, perhaps, to bestow a parting slap in the face upon your brother and me? But, as I have pointed out to you, you will be able to do neither without meeting your brother face to face."

"In that case, my dear madam, I fear I must resign myself to doing neither. I have but another hour at the outside to spend in London, and unless my brother forces his way into the house very shortly——"

He was dramatically interrupted by the sudden throwing open of the door, through which Count von Kahlenburg in person strode, unannounced. The newcomer bowed urbanely to the ladies—having

indeed been prepared by the venal handmaid for what he nevertheless proclaimed to be a pleasant surprise—but cut his greetings short just in time to intercept the retreat of Herr von Pardowitz, who, on recognising him, had made precipitately for the folding doors which gave access to a small back parlour.

“One moment, if you please!” cried the Count in German, while he seized his reluctant captive by the arm. “You do not wish to see me; that I can understand. But it is really indispensable that I should see you; and in order that I may do so, I must permit myself the freedom of lighting your gas.”

“You will permit yourself nothing, sir!” returned the other gruffly, in the same language. “This intrusion is against my express wishes, and I have to request you to withdraw.”

Count von Kahlenburg's only reply was to strike a match swiftly and apply it to two burners of the hanging gaselier above his head. The momentarily-released von Pardowitz made no second attempt to escape; but he fell back, shielding his eyes from the glare with his right hand.

"I am very sensitive to a bright light," he muttered; "be so good as to spare my eyesight."

"As soon as ever I have secured the testimony of my own," answered the Count blandly. "As I have just had the honour of telling you, Herr Weiss, it is indispensable for me to find out who you are—or, at the very least, to find out who you are not. Ah! but I perceive already that this is not going to be a difficult matter. No man can add to his stature in middle life, and you are fully two inches taller than my late brother. Also I can detect no trace of a scar on the left cheek which my brother earned for himself by falling headlong over a certain precipice, and which I am very sure that he exhibited to his dying day. In other respects I must admit a decided resemblance of feature and figure. Herr Weiss, Herr Weiss, you are a clever fellow; but I fear that you are a rascal! Come now," added the triumphant Count in English, "let us hear the whole truth; for your disguise can no longer deceive anybody here."

Mrs. Hamilton and Daphne had started to their feet and were scrutinising their discomfited host, who had lowered his sheltering hand and stood in the

full light—visibly, albeit skilfully, made up to represent an older man than he was. The lines upon his face, it could be seen, were the result of art, not of the passage of years; his white moustache was suspiciously yellow just above the lips; his eyes retained the unmistakeable clearness of youth. The game was so evidently up that there was little left for him to do, save to pluck off his wig, displaying a square, close-cropped head, with which all three spectators were well acquainted, and exclaim indignantly:

“I will be the death of that treacherous woman! She would certainly never have let you in if you had not bribed her!”

Count von Kahlenburg rubbed his hands, laughing aloud. “This comes,” cried he, “of presuming upon a pretty little talent for amateur theatricals! The stage, my dear Otto, is one thing, and real life is quite another. There are people, I grant you, who are to be imposed upon with marvellous ease; but your old uncle is not one of them, and I do not wonder at your having tried to run away from a test which, as you must have known very well, was

sure to prove fatal to your pretensions. I guessed from the first that you had tricked these ladies; but I did not, I own, give you credit for so much impudence as to have tricked them in your own person. It only shows with what facility those who wish to be deceived may be deceived!"

Mrs. Hamilton entered a faint protest. "Oh, if you think that I lent myself in any way to this—this monstrous imposition!——"

"My dear lady, I am persuaded that you are incapable of doing anything of the sort intentionally or consciously," the Count declared. "I merely suggest that your natural wish to clear your late husband's memory may have caused you to fall a victim to a plot which could never have succeeded with a moderately intelligent and cool-headed person, such as, for example, myself."

"It is all very well to call me unintelligent," returned Mrs. Hamilton, plucking up her spirit a little; "but how was I to know about a scar which I had never seen? And I am sure you exaggerate the difference in height. Besides, if he didn't take you in, you must bear in mind that he didn't even

try. Why, he turned tail the very moment that you put your nose in at the door!"

This last remark was addressed pointedly and resentfully to Otto, who in truth looked more than a little foolish. All that he could plead, and did ruefully plead, was that he would never have resorted to a stratagem which at the worst could have injured nobody, had he been aware of its superfluity. "We know now," he observed, "that my father was neither murdered nor accidentally killed. What a difference it would have made if we had known as much some weeks ago?"

"That," cried Mrs. Hamilton and Count von Kahlenburg in a breath, "is no excuse."

The former added: "I hope you are ashamed of yourself. You look as if you were, and you certainly ought to be. For my own part, I am not so much ashamed of having been duped by an extremely clever actor and mimic as of having arranged this complete victory for your uncle. You might so easily have spared me that humiliation by the simple expedient of ceasing to exist in your fictitious character? Why on earth didn't you?"

While Otto was confusedly putting forward some of the extenuating circumstances which might be urged in his defence, Daphne quietly stepped up to his side. "Let us acknowledge," said she, "that this manœuvre has been unjustifiable from first to last. All I know, and all I care about, is that it was devised for my sake. If Otto is to be condemned, I claim to be condemned with him."

"My dear child!—condemned to what?" expostulated Mrs. Hamilton.

"To Count von Kahlenburg's malediction, I suppose," answered Daphne, laughing a little. "I know, after what you said to me this afternoon, mother, that we shan't incur yours, even if we do decide to marry upon a very small income. Of course it was very bad of Otto to play you such a trick; still I don't think it is quite for me to blame him, and there is, at all events, this to be said, that it has done no sort of harm."

The culprit seized his apologist's hand and kissed it with respectful and grateful fervour. "I was sure you would absolve me," he exclaimed; "otherwise I should never have had the courage to adopt such

bold measures. But there was no other way that I could think of to overcome your mother's exaggerated scruples."

"And mine, then?" inquired Count von Kahlenburg, forestalling Mrs. Hamilton, who was about to speak. "Do you consider my scruples exaggerated, pray?—or merely irrelevant? Has it occurred to you that you depend entirely upon me for the means of supporting a wife?"

"That has occurred to me," answered the young man boldly; "but if Daphne doesn't care, I don't."

"We none of us care," struck in Mrs. Hamilton, suddenly going over to the enemy. "That is, we do care; only we are not going to yield to threats."

Now, Count von Kahlenburg was in a very good humour. He had proved that, however easily other people might be humbugged, a cleverer man than his clever nephew was required to take him in; he was most sincerely relieved to find that his brother (who might, after all, have been alive and have given him no end of trouble) was quite satisfactorily dead and buried; he liked to think that these three defiant

persons must, for all their brave words, be deeply desirous at heart of propitiating him. Finally, the longer he looked at Daphne the more he became convinced that her beauty and bearing would reflect credit upon a noble family. Therefore he decided to say, with mock humility :

"I cannot pretend to such magnificent indifference. I must needs yield to threats, provided that they are terrible enough, and I confess that the prospect of a forsaken old age alarms me. Miss Hamilton, I throw myself upon your mercy. I have been obstructive ; I thought it my duty to be so. But since my obstruction is of no avail, let me withdraw it and beg you to forget it, in return for the sincere admiration which it would be impossible for any man, young or old, to refuse you."

Thus Daphne's hand was again kissed, and everybody proceeded to forgive everybody else in terms which, if less carefully selected than Count von Kahlenburg's, were not less productive of general harmony and reciprocal esteem.

It was upon this scene of touching reconciliation that Jack Clough, hurrying into the room, intruded

unannounced. "I couldn't get here sooner," he began ; and then stopped short, looking rather sheepish and considerably bewildered. "But I have come quite too late, it seems," he resumed, under his breath, after a pause.

"My dear fellow," said Otto, stepping forward and clapping him on the shoulder, "you come too late to warn me of danger ; but you come in good time to congratulate me, and to receive my warmest thanks for all the help that I have had from you. Although, happily, our little artifice was uncalled-for, it has served at least to preserve me from despair during these dark weeks, and I doubt whether I could have kept it up without your aid."

This generous acknowledgment of services rendered was not over and above welcome to its recipient, who was at once apostrophised in a very different spirit by the remaining members of the party.

"Jack!" cried Mrs. Hamilton, aghast, "is it possible that you, of all people in the world, have been playing me false from first to last?"

"Oh, Captain Clough," chimed in Daphne reproachfully, "I did think that if you went in for decep-

tion, it was only because you had partly deceived yourself! I should never have suspected that you were laughing in your sleeve when you spoke to me as you did not long ago. There was some excuse—a good deal of excuse—for Otto; but I can't see what excuse there is for you!"

"My friend," said Count von Kahlenburg, with a grim countenance, "if you have any explanation to offer of your behaviour to me, I shall be glad to hear it."

"I thought," answered Jack patiently, "that I had fully explained my behaviour."

"By no means! You owned certainly that you had summoned me to England on a fool's errand, and that you were acting in my nephew's interest while you made believe to be acting in mine; but you gave me no key to your strange conduct. Still less did you confess that this notion of personating a dead man was devised by you."

"Well, I could not confess what was not the case. The notion, whatever it may have been worth, was Otto's, not mine. I thought it an idiotic one, and I told him so when he took me into his confidence;

but, of course, it was out of the question for me to betray him."

"I don't see that at all," said Mrs. Hamilton.

"Nor do I," said the Count severely. "As an honourable man, as my friend, as Mrs. Hamilton's friend, you were bound—I will not say to betray him, but at the very least to refuse him your connivance. It is painful to me to say so; but I am compelled to say that you are not the straightforward fellow I have always until now imagined you."

The silence of the bystanders appeared to signify acquiescence in that stern pronouncement. Possibly they were all conscious of being just a shade ridiculous—Otto, with his painted face; Daphne, by reason of the somewhat theatrical pose which she had been led to assume; Mrs. Hamilton, who had fallen into a visible trap; Count von Kahlenburg, who had made surrender to sentiment in the moment of victory. At such times a scapegoat becomes a useful creature, and the opportune arrival of Jack Clough may have supplied a generally felt want. That luckless and blameless man was hard put to it for a rejoinder. What, indeed, is there to be said when those whose

welfare you have studied at the expense of your own turn upon you like a pack of wolves upon a disabled brother? Still some sort of defence had to be attempted, and he had opened his lips to embark upon it when one more intruder came to his rescue, with loud words and something like a sheer physical struggle for admission. This was no other than Mrs. Perkins, engaged in a heated altercation with the landlady, against whose impeding resistance she appeared to have hurled the whole weight of her personal and moral superiority.

"My good woman," she was saying, "I tell you I only want a glance at the room; how can I engage rooms without even seeing them? I am sure Herr Weiss will not mind——"

She ceased abruptly and struck a fairly successful attitude of astonishment.

"Dear Mrs. Hamilton!—and dear Daphne too! Who would ever have thought of finding you here! I really must apologise; but the truth is that I am in search of rooms for some friends who will arrive to-morrow, and as I was told that Herr Weiss would be giving up these to-night, I thought I might ven-

ture just to look at them. Perhaps," she added, turning to Count von Kahlenburg with an ingratiating smile, "I have the pleasure of addressing Herr Weiss?"

The Count bowed and shook his head. "That is not my name, madam," he replied. "Herr Weiss has this moment left us, and I do not think he will return just at present."

Otto had indeed, made an expeditious retreat through the folding doors, behind which he was doubtless occupied in removing the tell-tale traces of his disguise. Mrs. Hamilton was staring silently and stonily at the stout lady, whose volubility, however, now that she had effected an entrance, was not to be checked by any such hostile intimations. Obstacles must be faced and overcome before any voyage of discovery can reach its desired conclusion, and Mrs. Perkins, being where she was in the character of a resolute explorer, was fully prepared to do battle with opposition. Thus she obtained the introduction to Count von Kahlenburg for which she boldly asked, and if some of her numerous questions met with evasive replies, while others remained unanswered, she had

nevertheless ascertained a good deal by the time that Otto, with washed face, re-entered the room.

"You have been seeing the last of Herr Weiss, I suppose?" remarked Count von Kahlenburg, with a slight wink at his nephew, who returned:

"Yes, I have seen the last of him; he has departed for good and all."

Mrs. Perkins pounced ravenously upon the young man, and, profiting by this diversion, Mrs. Hamilton beckoned Jack Clough to her side.

"Jack," whispered she, "do you want to be forgiven?"

"Oh, yes," he resignedly replied; "it is very evident that forgiveness is the utmost I can expect."

"Then, for goodness' sake, take that horrible woman away! I have asked her to go in the plainest language I could command, but she simply refuses to move!"

Jack nodded, and, in obedience to orders, advanced upon Mrs. Perkins, who was repeating shrilly, "But who is Herr Weiss?—who is Herr Weiss? You have none of you told me yet who Herr Weiss is."

"They never will," murmured Jack in her ear; "but I will give you an answer, if you will come away with me. Perhaps we have been here long enough, you and I."

That seemed to be as good a method as another of obeying orders, and it had, at any rate, the merit of promptly achieving its end. Mrs. Perkins took leave of the company without more ado, and fell upon her escort the moment that she and he were in the narrow entrance hall together.

"Well?—*who* is this man?"

"I'm sure I don't know," answered Jack composedly.

"Captain Clough, you promised to tell me who he was!"

"No; I only promised to give you an answer. I have given you a truthful one; I haven't the slightest idea who Herr Weiss is."

"But you must know—you do know—what it all means! You know, anyhow, that Count Otto and Miss Hamilton are engaged to be married."

"Oh, yes; I know that."

"And you know that there have been difficulties

and mysteries, and that Herr Weiss, whoever he may be, has been mixed up with them."

"Possibly. Only I should hold my tongue, you see, even if I were acquainted with the difficulties and mysteries of which you speak."

"Then," returned Mrs. Perkins, losing her temper for once, "all I can say is that you are very unfriendly, Captain Clough. So is Mrs. Hamilton, in whom we have taken the greatest interest, and who has shown us uncommonly little gratitude."

"Those who expect no gratitude here below," remarked Jack sententiously, "are proof against disappointment."

"H'm!—well, I hope you are not disappointed. As for me, this sort of thing almost makes me doubt whether it is ever worth while to take an interest in one's fellow-creatures."

"There," observed Jack, politely bowing the irate and baffled lady out, "I can sympathise with you; I have sometimes felt the same doubt myself."

"All the same," he muttered, after closing the front door behind Mrs. Perkins, "one does get one's reward. It isn't, perhaps, quite as sweet in the mouth

as it might be ; yet it is better than nothing. Daphne obtains her heart's desire, and that, I suppose, is what we all really wanted. Now I had better go and beg her pardon for having taken my humble share in bringing it about."

THE END.

